



## **Creating a Strategic Plan for the West Orange Public Schools**

### **Mission Statement**

The mission of the West Orange Public Schools is to engage in an energetic partnership with all components of this culturally-diverse community, to marshal resources to assist all students to reach their full potential through an academic emphasis on the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, to promote the highest quality intellectual and human relations development of our pupils, and to instill in all students the knowledge and decision-making skills essential to make appropriate choices and successfully meet the challenges they will encounter as productive members of society.

### **Session 1 of 3 - What are the Strengths/Achievements and Challenges/Opportunities of the West Orange Public Schools?**

On November 2, 2015 West Orange Public Schools administrators, Board of Education members, staff, parents, and community members came together to initiate strategic planning. The first evening's topic focused on the strengths/achievements, and challenges/opportunities of the West Orange Public Schools. The meeting began with a welcome by Board of Education President, Mr. Ron Charles. Mr. Jeffrey Rutzky, Superintendent, presented an excellent overview of the district. The Board members and administrators then left to provide for an atmosphere of free and open discussion. Facilitators Charlene Peterson and Mary Gassman, from New Jersey School Boards Association, introduced the strategic planning process and assisted throughout the process.

Just over 55 participants gathered in seven randomly assigned groups to identify the strengths/achievements and challenges/opportunities of the West Orange Public Schools through brainstorming and the sharing of ideas. After discussion, each group came to a consensus on its top 10 strengths/achievements and top 10 challenges/opportunities and presented those to the full group of meeting participants.

The information that follows is a summary of the work of the small groups. All consensus points are recorded and posted on the district's website to share the group work during the course of the strategic planning process.

**Group Consensus: Strengths/Achievements & Challenges/Opportunities**

**Red Dot Group:**

<b>Strengths/Accomplishments</b>	<b>Challenges/Opportunities</b>
Diversity	Making diversity of staff reflect the served community
High school course offerings	Logistics/safety issues with drop-off/pickup - ice & snow procedure
Technology – wireless, Chromebooks, Smartboards...	Involvement of high school seniors and recent graduates into this strategic planning process and the setting of 3-5 year goals.
Parents/PTA at elementary level	Training for staff in the use of technology – present and new.
Staff – many teachers with higher degrees	Empowering high school students to start their school day later
	Outreach to non-English speaking parents and caretakers.
	Improvement in guidance career counseling/ communication of course requirements.
	Inter-school meetings so that multiple buildings can communicate together and hear the same information
	Marketing of offerings/opportunities

**Yellow Dot Group:**

<b>Strengths/Accomplishments</b>	<b>Challenges/Opportunities</b>
Getting Chromebooks	Make technology more accessible to disadvantaged children
Anti-bullying initiatives	Concerns with Math <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ineffective teaching</li> <li>• inflexibility</li> </ul>
Diversity of student body	Need to find materials that are more creative and joyful
Fine Arts, especially the Music Department	Teachers teaching to the test
Sports Activities (like the variety)	Library access after school
Extra-curricular Clubs (many different ones)	Prior to implementing new programs, consider widespread implications and impact.
	Increase diversity of staff, especially teachers

**West Orange Public Schools Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes**

**Purple Dot Group:**

<b>Strengths/Accomplishments</b>	<b>Challenges/Opportunities</b>
Instructional staff	Vibrant curriculum at lower grades
Diversity – racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, learning abilities	Consistent follow through on curriculum initiatives
Facilities (mainly the high school)	Diversity – cultural understanding and preschool readiness
Course offerings	Follow state mandates but still maintain rich curriculum
Extracurricular offerings – music, fine arts	Get away from top-down initiatives. Solicit input from staff
Special Education	Facilities at lower schools – room for movement and play
	More integrative extracurricular opportunities for Special Education students
	More vocational offerings – not everyone is college ready.

**Orange Dot Group:**

<b>Strengths/Accomplishments</b>	<b>Challenges/Opportunities</b>
Diversity of student body	Overcoming a digital divide – not everyone has access to technology at home
Technology upgrades	Including/reaching out to non-native English speaking parents
Authentic hands-on teaching and learning experiences	Make advancements recognizing fiscal constraints
Summer enrichment program	Infrastructure – space, age
Special Education program/Basic Skills	Increase diversity within faculty/staff
Arts/Music/Drama programs **	Rapidly changing curriculum
	Need for support/programs for older students (Middle school/high school) for vocational training and self sufficiency
	Advocacy for inclusion – staff support

**Green Dot Group:**

<b>Strengths/Accomplishments</b>	<b>Challenges/Opportunities</b>
Music Program/Band	Too much administration
Diversity/Cultural	Too much teaching to the test
Strong parent community grades K-6	Revamp Guidance
HAP Program	Vocational Education
Staff salary – able to attract and retain good staff	Middle School Honors Program – still more work to be done
Central 6 / Positive	Transition into different schools – from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school

**West Orange Public Schools Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes**

Good Special Education programs at certain levels	Need more Math at the high school. Students have completed requirements prior to senior year
	Perception of concerns at Liberty
	Differentiation in instruction lacking
	More rigorous work versus worksheets in elementary
	Need to develop strong writing program

**Blue Dot Group:**

<b>Strengths/Accomplishments</b>	<b>Challenges/Opportunity</b>
Program diversity	Quality of teacher and student interaction – student input
Goal toward digital frontier	Disaggregate the data to reflect our diversity in district and educational special services
National sports teams/clubs (recognitions/ achievements)	How to reach our community who do not have computers as the district moves toward paperless
Maintain class size ratio	Language accessibility for all
Facilities at the high school level	Transportation – safety – late bus
Safety in schools - vigilance	Election Day security
Club options	Celebrate more of our accomplishments
Re-registration	More foreign language options
Strategic Planning	Upgrade facilities at elementary level
	Traffic safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pick up and drop offs</li> <li>• Kiss and Go lane</li> </ul>
	Weight of students’ backpacks

**Black Dot Group:**

<b>Strengths/Accomplishments</b>	<b>Challenges/Opportunities</b>
Diversity	Building improvements
Comprehensive school district	Infrastructure
Advocates – teacher with children	Class size (some schools)
Block schedule	Parking
Passionate staff (teachers)	Advanced degrees (staff)
Technology improvements	Teachers resistant to change (technology)
Extracurricular offerings (Clubs, sports, music, etc.)	Socioeconomic challenges with technology
Honors implementation	College Prep (SAT Prep, Writing from 9 <sup>th</sup> grade)
HAP Program	Classroom time spent on test prep (elementary)
ESL Program	Communication/consistency between elementary schools
Special Education program	Total expense on standardized testing
Building improvements	Buses/transportation
Professional Development offerings for teachers	Public relations

**West Orange Public Schools Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes**

Fiscal improvements	Students leaving district
	Curriculum (stagnant)
	Spanish curriculum (elementary)
	Learning outside of classroom (and testing)
	Science in elementary
	Boys (engagement) – post elementary
	HAP - communication
	Honors Program - access
	STEM integration
	Honors for Art students
	Low performing teachers – how is this handled?

**The second strategic planning session is scheduled for:**

Thursday, December 3, 2015 from 7 – 8:30 pm at  
West Orange High School, Tarnoff Cafeteria

During the December 3 meeting, using a similar brainstorming process, we will identify our visions for the West Orange Public Schools five years from now.

The final meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 26 to write goal statements using the input from the two previous sessions.

Please join us. Everyone is welcome, even if you were not able to attend the first meeting. We look forward to seeing you!