



# Strategic Plan 2023-2028

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A BLUEPRINT FOR THE RIVER VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT TO  
ADDRESS ITS KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Adopted by the Board of Education

DATE: JUNE 8, 2023

# Table of Contents

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Introduction.....	2
Who We Are.....	3
Strategic Plan Purpose.....	5
Plan Development Process .....	5
Framework.....	6
Terminology.....	7
Assets and Challenges.....	8
Beliefs .....	9
Goals, Issues, and Strategies .....	10
Section Overview.....	11
Assessment and Adjustments.....	11
Student Achievement and Instruction .....	12
Student Engagement and Support.....	14
Facilities.....	16
Community Communications and Engagement.....	18
Finance and Operations .....	20

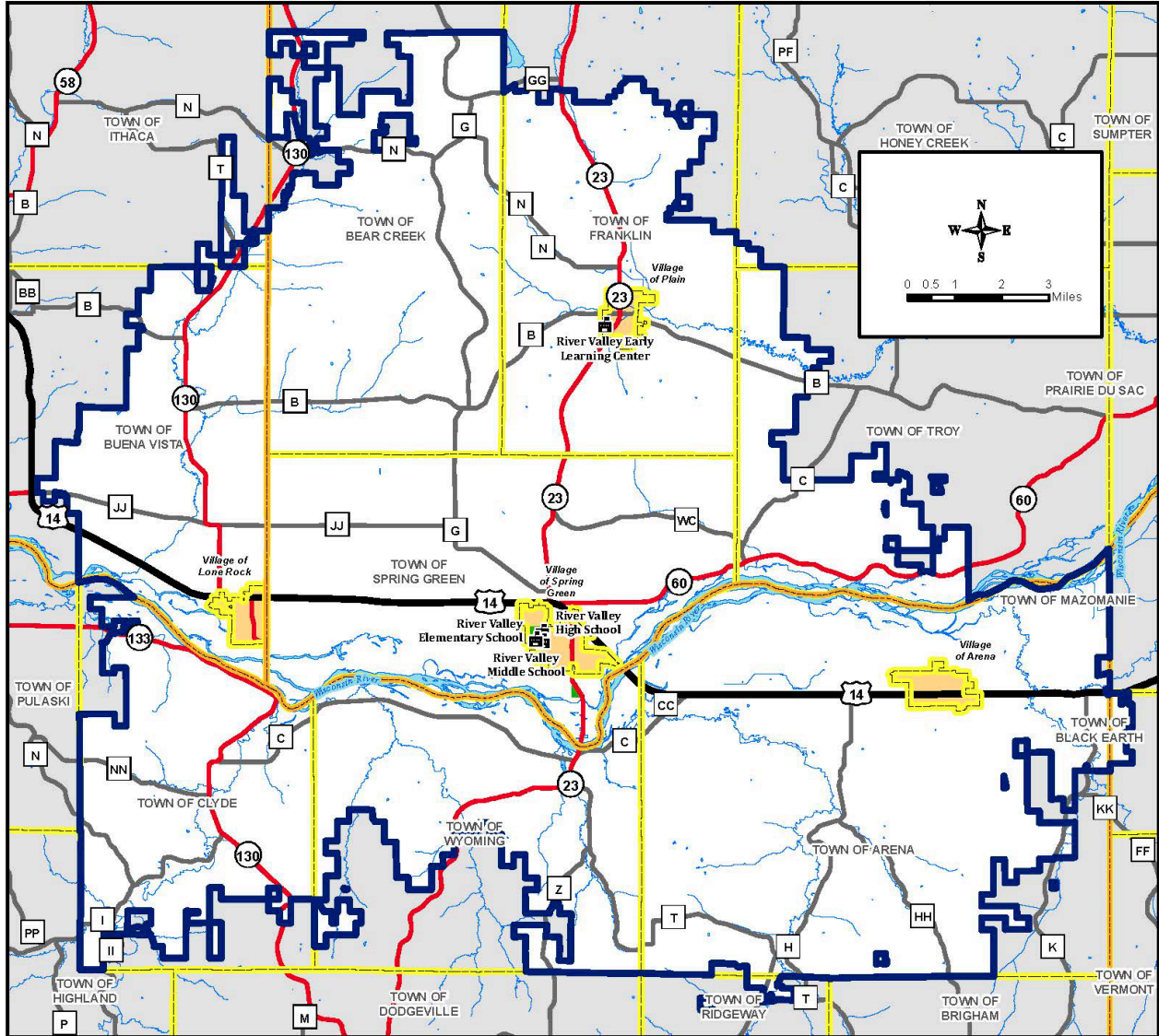
# Introduction

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The River Valley School District is a geographically large, but sparsely populated rural district in scenic southwest Wisconsin. This *Strategic Plan*, prepared with community insight and involvement, will guide District decision making over the next five years.

## Who We Are

The River Valley School District is a public school district in southwestern Wisconsin. The expansive District encompasses nearly 300 square miles and all or part of 16 villages and towns. The River Valley area provides a rich and diverse context of rural, small town, agricultural, natural, and arts-centered amenities. Each of nine geographic areas of the District is represented by one member of the Board of Education.



As of September 2023, the River Valley School District educated 1,110 4K-12 students. This is a decrease from 1,245 4K-12 students educated in 2015 though enrollment has stabilized over the past few years. This amounts to a low density of 3.7 students per square mile. The UW-

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Madison Applied Population Laboratory has projected generally stable to modestly decreasing enrollment over the next several years, via a separate report available from the District.

The District and its students are high performers, as evidenced by the following achievements:

- Students' average ACT score in Spring 2021 ranked the River Valley School District #3 in its conference and among southwestern Wisconsin (CESA 3) school districts.
- District has offered all-day 4K programming since the 2013-14 school year—many districts that provide 4K only provide part-time programming.
- District is a leader in the use of technology as an educational tool. Each 3<sup>rd</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grader has their own Chromebook for educational purposes. River Valley Television (RVTV) is in the top 2% nationally in use of this medium. Technology education and engineering students win numerous awards at the Skills USA competition.
- High School offers 10 advanced placement classes and 12 dual credit classes from Madison College, Southwest Technical College, and UW-Oshkosh.
- District middle and high school students have historically had high levels of co-curricular activity involvement. While negatively affected by the pandemic, participation rates are rebounding and a new stadium is expected to fuel a further increase.
- Students consistently achieve at high levels in co-curricular activities, including the performing arts, FFA, forensics, math, mock trial, Skills USA, and sports.

The River Valley School District educates students in four schools over two sites. The River Valley Early Learning Center serves 4K and 5K students in Plain. The District's 101-acre Spring Green campus includes River Valley Elementary School (grades 1-4), Middle School (grades 5-8) and High School (grades 9-12). The campus is at the geographic center of the District, accessible via U.S., State, and County highways and the District's transportation service.

At the time this *Strategic Plan* was being prepared, the District was also undertaking a facility study guided by a citizen advisory task for and with professional assistance from FEH Design Architects. While "Facilities" remains a key element of this *Strategic Plan 2023-2028*—and many of its other strategies depend on its facilities—District stakeholders should follow and refer to the separate facilities study for detail. The facilities study is expected to conclude by summer 2023, after which the Board of Education will decide what to do with its results.

## Strategic Plan Purpose

The *Strategic Plan* describes the District’s most significant issues—and strategies to address these issues—over the next five years. Issues and strategies are categorized by student achievement and instruction, student engagement and support, facilities, community communications and engagement, and finance and operations.

The District—including the Board of Education, administration, teachers, and support staff—will use the *Strategic Plan* as one basis for short- and mid-term decision making. These decisions are often embedded in annual operating and capital budgets, new or amended policies at the District or school levels, possible referenda, and new or revised programming.

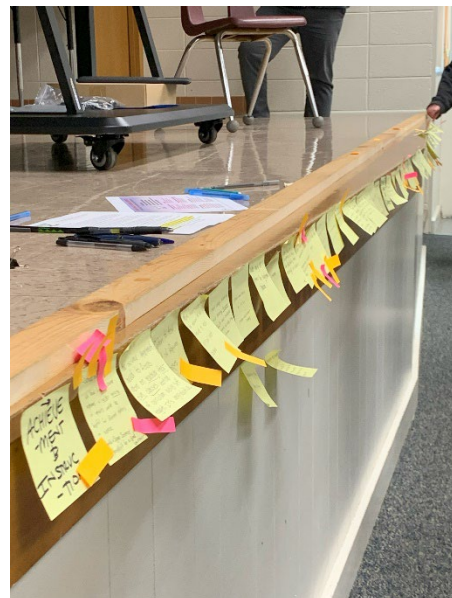
This *Strategic Plan 2023-2028* updates the *Strategic Plan 2018-2023*. The Board elected to update its *Strategic Plan* for reasons other than just the new time horizon. Much in the expiring *Plan* has been achieved, and the District found value in this *Plan* and the process to create it. Further, some of its issues and strategies may be out of date or have proven impractical to implement, still other issues have emerged over the past five years, and there are now new students, residents, Board members, and District staff to engage and other long-time stakeholders to reengage.

## Plan Development Process

The River Valley School District began its latest strategic planning process in December 2022. The District hired MDROffers Consulting—a school district planning consultant from Madison—to help update the *Strategic Plan*. The Board of Education, its Policy Committee, and administrative staff provided direction and support throughout the process.

The consultant engaged in an extensive outreach program, designed to brainstorm potential issues and strategies. These included four community workshops; a work session with the Facilities Advisory Task Force largely on non-facilities matters; a high school student workshop; and a teacher and support staff survey that yielded 101 responses.

At time of writing, the District’s [Web site](#) contained other information on the planning process, including a more complete description of the process, the results of stakeholder engagement efforts, and an achievement evaluation of the *Strategic Plan 2018-2023*.



# Framework

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This Strategic Plan is based on a set of core beliefs and goals, the District's unique assets and challenges, stakeholder input, terminology, and a method of organizing information.

## Terminology

This *Strategic Plan* relies on a set of terms described below. These terms help assure that the Plan is well-organized and comprehensive in its coverage.

### Strategic Plan Terminology

**Asset** – A particular strength of or within the District that distinguishes it from many other school districts.

**Challenge** – An actual or perceived weakness or risk of or within the District—either now or anticipated over the next five years.

**Belief** – A core principle guiding all of the District’s decisions and policies.

**Category** – A way to organize the presentation of goals, issues, and strategies. Also, one of the following: student achievement and instruction, student engagement and support, facilities, community communications and engagement, finance and operations.

**Issue** – A fundamental question, concern, challenge, or opportunity affecting the District now or over the next five years.

**Strategy** – A course of action, decision, program, and/or resource allocation to resolve an issue.

**Goal** – A broad statement that expresses the District’s priorities about how it approaches strategies to address issues in each category.



## Assets and Challenges

A scan of the River Valley School District’s influences and environment is critical to understanding its issues and potential strategies to address them. The following is an assessment of the District’s assets and challenges.

<b>Assets</b>
District’s focus on its students (e.g., “beliefs”)
High student achievement
Comprehensive curriculum and unique academic offerings
Moderate class sizes
Excellent co-curricular activities with good participation
Dedicated teachers, support staff, and administration
Large campus site (101 acres) in District’s geographic center
Creative community with rich culture, heritage, and ecosystem
Engaged business community
Strong youth apprenticeship and work experience programs

<b>Challenges</b>
Imposing fiscal outlook
Aging school buildings, particularly the middle and high schools
School transitions
Large, low density geographic service area
Statewide educator shortage and retiring teachers
Lower student enrollment than in past
Increasing our outcomes for low and moderate income students
Labor and housing shortages, particularly rentals and new homes
Lack of access to high-speed internet

## Beliefs

In 2014, the District engaged in an effort to establish its mission. Emerging from that effort was a set of beliefs, approved by the Board of Education and reproduced to the right.

During this *Strategic Plan* update process, the Board concluded that these beliefs remain relevant and should guide this *Strategic Plan*. The

Board also reaffirmed the following added points from the 2018 planning process: that any program or service advised through the *Strategic Plan 2023-2028* ought to serve the student population, be relevant to all students, and be affordable given present and anticipated fiscal conditions.

### We believe that...

...students are our number one priority

...every student has the right to learn

...instruction is rigorous and relevant

...assessment is purposeful and drives instruction

...learning is a collaborative process

# Goals, Issues, and Strategies

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The District will execute a set of strategies to address its issues in a manner that advances its beliefs and goals. To best assure its success, each strategy described in this section has an assigned timeframe, set of resources, and performance metrics.

## Section Overview

Within this section of the *Strategic Plan*, the District has organized its issues and strategies into five categories. These include student achievement and instruction, student engagement and support, facilities, community communications and engagement, and finance and operations. There are overlaps and interrelationships among these categories.

For each category, this section includes a related goal, one or two issues identified during this planning process, and a set of strategies to address the issues. Each strategy includes a proposed timeframe (when it should start and end), resources (e.g., personnel, funding), and performance metrics (how success in strategy achievement will be measured).

With oversight from the Board and its committees, the District's administration will need to flesh out each strategy. Successful execution of each strategy may depend upon allocation of sufficient resources, and upon the actual availability of the required time to execute the strategy relative to other assignments, opportunities, and challenges that may emerge.

## Assessment and Adjustments

The District intends to measure progress towards achieving each strategy on at least an annual basis, based on the metrics included in this section. Assessment will begin with an administrative report to the appropriate Board committee. The committee will then evaluate performance and suggest any adjustments, which will be presented to the full Board. The Board may direct adjustments to the *Strategic Plan*, particular strategies, and/or performance metrics.

The *Strategic Plan* update process yielded a long list of potential issues, and possible strategies to address them. Only a small set of those issues are addressed in this *Strategic Plan*, based on Board priorities and on time, budget, and other constraints. In addition, some other identified issues are and will be addressed by the District through ongoing and "below the radar" efforts. Therefore, while not every identified issue is covered in this *Strategic Plan*, every potential issue raised during this process has been considered. Further, efforts to address these other issues are often moving forward on separate tracks, including through the District's parallel facility planning process.

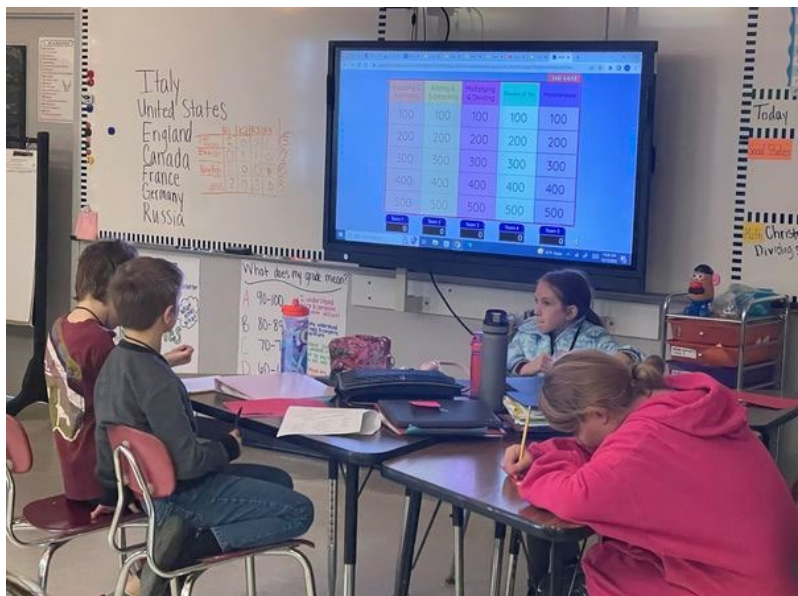
## Student Achievement and Instruction

**Coverage.** “Student Achievement and Instruction” covers the amount of academic content a student learns, and the knowledge and skills that will prepare them for successful lives. It is often measured through grades, test scores, graduation rates, or post-secondary educational attainment or job placement rates.

**Goal.** The District will provide a challenging array of courses and improve all students’ academic achievement to prepare them for post-secondary education, productive careers, and happy and successful lives.

**Issues.** How can the District assure that curriculum is responsive, relevant, and suitably challenging? How can students’ achievement be improved, particularly for those students who are less economically advantaged?

See the following page for the District’s strategies to achieve this goal and address these issues.



Student Achievement and Instruction Strategies	Timeframe	Resources	Performance Metrics
<p>1. Implement the District’s Curriculum Renewal and Design Plan. Refine the Curriculum Plan as warranted to include both academic and social-emotional curriculum, recognize individual student differences in learning, properly integrate technology, and take advantage of the District’s unique assets.</p>	<p>Rolling 7-year cycle of renewal by subject matter (e.g., math, science)</p>	<p>Administrative staff and teachers, using operating funds</p>	<p>Improving academic performance as measured by District and State assessments (e.g., iReady, ACT, Wisconsin Forward)</p>
<p>2. Assure that teachers are well trained in and follow the District’s curriculum and beliefs.</p>	<p>2023-24 school year, and ongoing thereafter, using PLCs to integrate mid-year arriving teachers</p>	<p>Professional learning communities (PLCs), guided by administrative staff</p>	<p>Assuring full involvement in PLCs and verifying use of updated curriculum</p>
<p>3. Provide additional and customized support to students who require it, including assistance for both high-need and high-achieving students.</p>	<p>2023-24, and ongoing</p>	<p>Funded by operating fund; Assigned staff to identify and encourage candidate students</p>	<p>Improving District &amp; State assessment scores; increasing AP enrollment and apprenticeships</p>
<p>4. Improve readiness for post-secondary education, job training, and careers, among students of all achievement levels and career paths.</p>	<p>By end of 2023-24 school year, and at end of each school year thereafter</p>	<p>Principals and teachers, aided by curriculum renewal, design, and implementation</p>	<p>Increased % of grads in District intention survey with specific plan for more education, training, or job</p>

## Student Engagement and Support

**Coverage.** “Student Engagement and Support” covers the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion students show towards their learning experiences, plus social and emotional connections to peers, teachers, and parents, including through classes, co-curricular activities, and less formal contacts.

**Goal.** The District will encourage social, emotional, and physical health and growth in all of our students, and strong and meaningful connections to others and the broader world.

**Issues.** How can the District support and engage students in their challenges, transitions, behaviors, and readiness to learn? How can the breadth and depth of our students’ participation in co-curricular activities increase?

See the following page for the District’s strategies to achieve this goal and address these issues.



Student Engagement and Support Strategies	Timeframe	Resources	Performance Metrics
1. Enhance efforts to welcome and transition students and families to schools.	For 2023-24 school year, and ongoing thereafter	Teachers, Administration, PTOs	Assess efforts each year, near start of 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester; use 9 <sup>th</sup> grade specialized Blackhawk Time; % of parent survey response noting welcome
2. Establish a sense of belonging for all students.	For 2023-24 school year, and ongoing thereafter	Teachers, support staff, older students assisting younger	No District students without adult connection at school, as revealed by student/teacher connection survey
3. Clearly communicate expectations for student behavior and development at all grades at the start of each school year and regularly thereafter, and provide customized support to individual students as needed to support positive behaviors.	Each September, and after each winter and spring break, and on an as-needed basis otherwise	Teachers, Administration, PTOs. Position within Blackhawk Code, Traits, or Behaviors	Reduced disciplinary referrals; Increased recognition of positive behaviors or reduced negative behaviors
4. Vary teaching methods and classroom opportunities to enhance student engagement.	2023-24 and ongoing; 2026-27 furniture and equipment upgrades	Teachers, with PLC and administrative support, student feedback	Increased student attendance rates
5. Identify and breakdown barriers to co-curricular participation at both middle and high schools, and engage with students with no or low participation to learn/address what inhibits participation.	Assess 2022-23 participation, with targeted outreach for 2023-24 school year; repeat each year	Athletic and Activities Director; District administrative staff	Increased annual high school participation in co-curriculars to 90% by end of 2025-26 school year
6. Explore summer student programming beyond credit recovery offerings.	For possible summer 2024 or 2025 start	District administrative staff	Study nearby districts; parent survey; affordable cost



## Facilities

**Coverage.** “Facilities” covers the District’s buildings and grounds, including their location, condition, space, and suitability to modern educational needs, and considering common areas, standard and rotation classrooms, technology, and athletic and other co-curricular facilities.

**Goal.** The District will provide facilities that deliver safe, comfortable, modern, and sustainable environments in which to learn, grow, and collaborate.

**Issue.** How can we make sure the District’s school facilities support its other strategies and beliefs?

See the following page for the District’s strategies to achieve this goal and address this issue. Perhaps more importantly, track the results of the District’s facilities planning process.



Facilities Strategies	Timeframe	Resources	Performance Metrics
<p>1. Implement results of the long-range facility planning effort, prioritizing facility enhancements and ongoing operating cost reductions (e.g., transportation) and recognizing enrollment changes and budget limitations. Assure that the long-range facility plan clearly includes or is paired with benefits for the entire District community.</p>	<p>Completion of <i>planning</i> effort in 2023. Any major construction expenditure not expected until later in 5-year period.</p>	<p>Citizen task force to explore range of alternative paths and advise Board of Education and its Facilities Committee</p>	<p>Community understanding and involvement in planning process; Community accepted long-range facility plan</p>
<p>2. Follow the District’s maintenance plan for its facilities, and adjust as necessary to be consistent with the selected long-range facilities plan.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Operating revenue</p>	<p>% of annual parent survey respondents (see below) who agree that school facilities are well-maintained and provide a healthy environment</p>

## Community Communications and Engagement

**Coverage.** “Community Communications and Engagement” means the methods and success of the District in sharing information, and involving and interacting with members of the school community. These include parents, residents without kids in school, and community and business leaders.



**Goal.** The District will continually improve communications and relationships within and beyond the River Valley area to exchange information, build and maintain trust, and facilitate community growth and health.

**Issues.** How can we maintain communication, connection, and value with our entire District community?

See the following page for the District’s strategies to achieve this goal and address this issue.



<b>Community Communications and Engagement Strategies</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Performance Metrics</b>
1. Initiate the annual parent and staff satisfaction and performance surveys.	Starting in June 2024	Primarily through digital platform (e.g., Web-based survey), but with hard-copy surveys also available	At least 50% parent and 80% staff participation; Parent respondents' residence locations and demographics reflective of community
2. Welcome involvement, maintain transparency, and regularly engage the community on District operations, decision making processes, academic and co-curricular offerings, and success stories.	2023-24, and ongoing	Administration and teachers disseminating information across multiple platforms.	Positive related responses to parent and teacher satisfaction surveys
3. Increase positive interaction outreach with entire District community, including with businesses, volunteers, and other adults.	2024-25 school year; ongoing thereafter	Collaboration with Chamber and others; recruit volunteer support and special funding	Greater levels of satisfaction in "involvement" questions on proposed annual parent survey
4. Improve communication with outgoing and former students, to maintain connection, provide resources for current students, and encourage eventual return for those who have left the District.	Spring 2023, with continued upgrades and maintenance thereafter	Administrative effort to improve information obtained from outgoing seniors, and maintain alumni list	More robust alumni list and possibly interactive map of alumni locations and professions; alumni returning to River Valley

## Finance and Operations

**Coverage.** “Finance and Operations” covers how the District is run, including budgetary constraints and opportunities. This category also includes the Board of Education, administration, teachers, and support staff.

**Goal.** The District will responsibly manage its operations and finances during a time of significant transition, focusing on student achievement and engagement as its top priority, and on maintaining comprehensive educational programming and moderate class sizes.

**Issues.** How can the District continue to retain and attract quality teachers and other staff? How can the District’s strategies and beliefs be advanced in an environment of continued budget challenges?

See the following page for the District’s strategies to achieve this goal and address these issues.



<b>Finance and Operations Strategies</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Performance Metrics</b>
1. Remain competitive on teacher and other staff pay, benefits, and support.	Annual salary and benefit review during budget process	Operating fund, via continued successful operating referenda	Pay & benefits competitive with area districts; Satisfaction through teacher survey results
2. Reward teachers and other staff who demonstrate growth, development, and long-term commitment.	Continue current program rewarding longevity	Operating fund	95% teacher and support staff retention (not inc. retirements)
3. Provide time and opportunities for teacher training, idea sharing, planning, interaction, and leadership development.	Ongoing, with individual efforts rolled out as time and budget permit	Operating fund; administrative staff planning with teacher involvement; PLCs	Increasing % teachers expressing satisfaction with job and professional development
4. Correlate District staffing to student enrollment numbers, student interests, and goals to maintain comprehensive educational programming and moderate class sizes.	For 2023-24 school year, and in preparation for each school year thereafter	School Board, with advice from District administrative staff	District annual expenditure increases within budgetary limits
5. Increase funding avenues, including through grants, public-private partnerships, and donation opportunities.	2023-24, and ongoing thereafter	Administrative review of grants, partnerships, and fundraising refinements	Increased % of District budget funded by sources other than property tax
6. Pursue operating referenda to maintain moderate class sizes and comprehensive educational programming across subjects.	Anticipated 2025 referendum, ideally for funds through 2028	Administrative staff, with potential for outside support	Sustainable operating budget, with 25-30% fund balance