



# WPS Strategic Plan Stakeholder Engagement



Center for Evaluation &  
Educational Leadership

**PREPARED FOR:**  
**Wichita Public Schools, USD 259**  
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## **Executive Summary**

Wichita Public Schools (WPS) USD 259 adopted a set of Strategic Plan Goals in 2018 encompassing four key areas: graduation rate, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency, market value assets for graduates, and school safety. By 2023, the WPS Strategic Plan had entered its fifth year of implementation and district leadership sought valuable stakeholder input before making any recommended changes to the strategic plan goals.

Leadership at WPS collaborated with the Center for Evaluation and Educational Leadership (CEEL) at the University of Kansas to facilitate stakeholder engagement focus groups to gather relevant input and suggestions on the strategic plan moving forward. The CEEL conducted 13 in-person focus groups, administered two online presentations with surveys, and reviewed district data pertinent to the four strategic plan goals.

CEEL meticulously examined key findings within each focus group and again across all focus groups and summarized them into a set of overall key findings. These insights served as a foundation for a set of recommendations that was provided for the WPS Strategic Planning Committee's consideration as they make recommendations to the WPS School Board relative to changes in the current strategic plan goals.

The final recommendations for consideration align to the original essential questions that WPS asked CEEL to gather stakeholder input.

1. What are the top skills, both life skills and academic skills, our students will need to be successful in the future?
2. What opportunities do we need to consider continuing/adding/modifying to support students to be future-ready?
3. What additions/modifications are needed in the current WPS Strategic Plan Goals that would help students achieve college, career, and life readiness?

In total, the CEEL met with 241 in person participants, and received input from 623 online participants. Most participants agreed with the four goals set out in the current WPS Strategic Plan, followed by an extensive set of suggestions for the indicators under each goal for consideration. This report includes a summary of those suggestions, followed by summaries of all focus groups, including a summary set of relevant data that aligns to the four Strategic Plan Goals.

## **District Overview**

Wichita Public Schools (USD 259) serves the diverse community of Sedgwick County in south-central Kansas. USD 259 is the largest school district in the state, educating a population of over 46,000 students. WPS is also the third-largest employer in the 4-county metropolitan area with over 5,600 full-time employees. The district's student body makes up 11% of all public school attendees in the state of Kansas. Over half of all school-aged children in the county are educated in one of USD 259's award-winning schools.

The district is comprised of 94 learning centers. This figure includes 54 elementary schools (K-5), 15 middle schools (6-8), three K-8 schools, nine high schools (9-12), and nine special schools. Housed in these schools is an incredibly diverse population of students, representing 93 countries with 112 languages spoken in the homes of USD 259 families. Approximately 7,200 students in the Wichita Public Schools receive ESOL services, demonstrating the rich diversity that USD 259 has to offer.

In the past five years, WPS has experienced an increase in graduation rates from 74% to 80.4%, a goal set forward by WPS's current strategic plan. This figure falls short of the state average of 89.3%. WPS also reports that during the 2022-2023 school year, nearly half of the student population was chronically absent, missing at least 18 days of the school year. This figure is greater than the state average of about 25%. While WPS stakeholders may believe chronic absenteeism is unique to their issues, this is a national trend coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Evaluation Process**

The Center for Evaluation and Educational Leadership (CEEL) at the University of Kansas was contacted by leadership at USD 259 to assist in the process of gathering stakeholder input on the current WPS strategic plan, which was established in 2018 and is in its fifth year. Specifically, WPS leadership wanted information gathered on the following essential questions/objectives:

1. What are the top skills, both life skills and academic skills, our students will need to be successful in the future?
2. What opportunities do we need to consider continuing/adding/modifying to support students to be future-ready?
3. What additions/modifications are needed in the current WPS Strategic Plan Goals that would help students achieve college, career, and life readiness?

For CEEL to accomplish this task, a set of objectives were set in place, which included:

1. Review of current strategic plan in WPS, along with relevant data to support the plan.
2. Review existing USD 259 culture and climate data that can inform the process.

3. Hold 8-12 in-person Focus Group interviews of key stakeholders at USD 259. Groups will contain 12-15 individuals but may include a larger audience if needed.
4. Gather additional survey data of 8-12 key stakeholder groups at USD 259.
5. Review support provided to USD 259 from KSDE and TASN.
6. Provide a comprehensive report with a set of key findings and recommendations for USD 259 to consider over the next 3-5 years regarding the WPS strategic plan, including targeted supports for implementation and consideration in Phase II.

CEEL staff conducted 13 different in-person stakeholder focus groups, which included;

1. Chamber of Commerce
2. Community Leaders
3. Community Partners
4. Higher Education
5. Central Office Staff and DLT
6. Invited Parents and Site Council
7. Open Community
8. Principals and Assistant Principals
9. Teachers (two different groups)
10. Retirees of the district
11. Parents (Spanish language)
12. Students

The WPS staff also recorded two in-person sessions and posted them to the district website. There was an English version and a Spanish version. These two online options were open to the public to view and provide input with the same online survey as the in-person group. The online options were open to the public for 14 days.

CEEL wants to thank the staff at WPS who worked diligently to organize all of the logistics that were required for this project to be successful. A great deal of work took place on their part and it reflects the pride that they have in the school district.

## **Summary of Key Findings**

The insights and recommendations stemming from each of the 15 stakeholder group sessions (comprising 13 in-person and 2 open-ended online sessions) are reported in the latter pages of this report. These insights encapsulate the unique perspectives of individuals representing each stakeholder group. In this section of the report, we summarize the overarching takeaways derived from the in-person stakeholder feedback sessions and survey results, reflecting the entire spectrum of data collected. It is noteworthy to distinguish between the in-person and open-ended online sessions, and this distinction is elaborated upon in the following paragraph.

There were over 590 respondents to the online survey option. We provide a brief summary of the open-ended online responses and recommendations here, separating this data from the feedback collected from the in-person stakeholder groups. This deliberate separation is based on a

rationale rooted in the context of respondent behavior. Approximately 15% of the online participants (N=94) viewed the video presentation detailing the strategic plan before responding to the survey, while the majority, (approximately 85% of the online respondents) offered recommendations without viewing the contextualizing information provided by the video. Consequently, a significant portion of responses expressed concerns unrelated to enhancing the Strategic Plan. Moreover, a breakdown of respondent demographics reveals that 499 respondents identified as parents, 94 as WPS-certified staff, 53 as classified staff, 45 as community members, and 22 as students. Participants had the flexibility to identify in two different categories. Given the context just described, when responding to the question about the goals, 244 (49%) agreed or strongly agreed with the district's goals, 135 (27%) had no opinion, 121 (24%) of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the goals, and 91 did not provide an answer to this question. Recommendations revolving around the evaluation's primary purpose emphasized school safety, student behavior, the necessity for mental health support, and the need for post-graduation life skills and employability classes. Respondents strongly recommended more attention and support for students needing special education beginning in pre-school and the early grades. Additionally, numerous recommendations highlighted the necessity of improving communication between schools and parents.

A majority (60%) of individuals across all 13 in-person stakeholder groups stated support for the WPS Strategic Plan's four goals: 1) Increasing the graduation rate, 2) Increasing 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency, 3) Increasing student completion of certifications and college credit, and 4) Ensuring schools are trusted as safe places. The goal that received the most recommendations for a shift in focus and district priorities was Goal 2. Various stakeholders proposed broadening the academic achievement focus to explicitly encompass mathematics alongside reading. Additionally, they advocated for addressing academic achievement in both reading and mathematics across all grade levels.

Given the definitive support for the Strategic Plan's goals, most recommendations for modifications centered on the indicators designated to measure goal attainment. Stakeholders proposed refinements and identified different or supplementary results that the district could focus on. Many comments were directed towards the 20% of WPS students who do not graduate (Goal 1), suggesting that indicators could address chronic absenteeism, inclusivity of career/college preparation pathway participation (identifying subgroups of students disproportionally not represented and why), or provide increased and personalized support and encouragement to less engaged students. Regarding Goal 2, stakeholders recommended indicators focusing on academic support provision and reporting on the relative improvement in student outcomes for those not achieving reading or math goals at benchmarks throughout the K-12 continuum.

In discussions surrounding Goal 3, every stakeholder group supported the wide array of opportunities available to students for career and college readiness programs and pathways. However, a common concern emerged regarding **the lack of comprehensive knowledge** about these programs. Recommendations for additions and modifications to this goal and its indicators were centered on enhancing communication about these opportunities to increase student participation. Stakeholders discussed communication needs and proposed innovative strategies to reach more students, such as recruiting successful student participants to share their experiences

and utilizing varied communication platforms, like TikTok and YouTube, and videos as well as text-based information. Stakeholders across sessions repeatedly recommended the district begin communication with students and parents/family members about career and college readiness before students are about to enter high school. For example, in elementary school, the district could provide awareness activities, and in middle school, the district could promote the exploration of career and college prep pathways through a variety of information avenues and experiences. Avenues for providing information about more complicated processes on accessing desired pathways like school transfer procedures, timelines, resolving transportation challenges, and program expectations need to be equitable and appropriate to the population the district wants to reach, as well as repetitive or timely.

Conversations regarding Goal 4 focused on questions about the accuracy of satisfaction survey results in portraying school safety as experienced by students. Limited recommendations were gathered for this goal. However, the student focus group suggested language changes, emphasizing schools as “welcoming” environments, alongside being “safe” spaces. The need to emphasize teacher/student relationships as indicators for creating welcoming and safe learning environments was underscored. A few stakeholder groups highlighted the importance of mental health support for both students and teachers to foster safer school spaces.

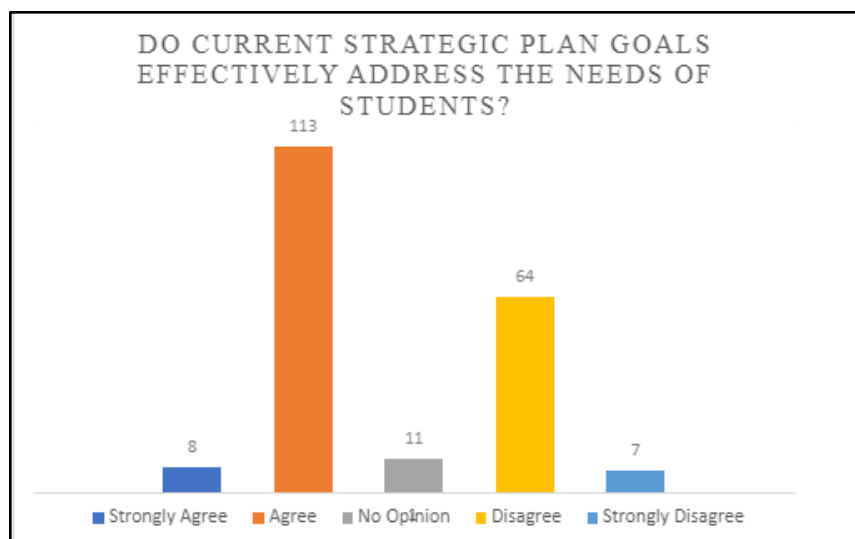
The discussion surrounding the skills essential for students to succeed post-school predominantly emphasized intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. The word clouds generated by stakeholder groups in the subsequent pages highlight these priorities. Participants linked this dialogue about essential skills with discussions on career and college readiness opportunities. Many individuals across stakeholder groups recommended incorporating information and instruction in life skills and employability skills into the Xello tool, or as a standalone, potentially mandatory class. Clubs were suggested as a platform for developing and practicing these skills, with teachers expressing a need for better preparation to teach these skills effectively.

Lastly, stakeholders noted a significant absence of language in the Strategic Plan pertaining to middle school outcomes as a foundation for achieving district goals. Concerns were raised about potential disengagement of middle school personnel and constituents from recognizing their role in realizing the WPS mission. Discussions emphasized the need to explicitly integrate language about middle schools’ roles in achieving district goals to ensure their active involvement in fulfilling the WPS vision. The role of middle schools in student exploration of career and college futures, developing life and employability skills, and as another benchmark in measuring achievement in reading and math were discussed previously, and could be included in refinements to the current strategic plan.

## **Recommendations**

The current WPS Strategic Plan was initiated in 2018 and is now in its fifth year. Participants representing 13 stakeholder groups were invited to review the plan and provided input to be considered in updating the plan. Consensus indicated definitive support (60%) for the goals outlined in the existing WPS Strategic Plan with 35% recording disagreement with the overall Strategic Plan goals. Concerns were expressed regarding the scope of certain goals, advocating

for a need to fine-tune and reevaluate indicators to spotlight new priority areas within the broader goals. The feedback from stakeholders shaped the recommendations associated with each question that WPS Leadership posed to KU-CEEL for exploration within the WPS community.



**What are the top skills, both life skills and academic skills, our students will need to be successful in the future?**

When considering intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive skills demonstrating positive impacts on in school and post-school success, stakeholder groups' opinions coalesced around communication as most important, followed by adaptability, integrity, and initiative. Other skills around which there was agreement as important across groups included self-regulation, teamwork, goal setting and curiosity. See the word cloud below which illustrates the relative importance of life skills as reported by survey respondents.

- Consider how focusing on life skills and employability skills can be intentionally foregrounded in the strategic plan and district action. Professional development for teachers on how to incorporate life skill development in ongoing instruction, a stand-alone class on life skills, focused opportunities for practice of life skills in clubs and sports were all mentioned as possible avenues.
- Resources for teaching life skills and competencies can be found at [College & Career Competencies Framework \(cccframework.org\)](https://cccframework.org)



percentage for graduation students, and second, introducing a priority indicator that addresses students not graduating. This could encompass reasons such as chronic absenteeism or other issues, along with potential solutions to ensure students graduate on time and reduce dropout rates.

- Goal 2 emphasizes the district's commitment to high standards of student academic achievement, with a specific focus on 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade reading proficiency, a well-recognized critical milestone for ongoing scholastic success. The planning committee should consider expanding this goal to encompass achievements in both reading and mathematics, establishing benchmarks that not only emphasize the 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade milestone but also include others throughout the K-12 educational journey.
- Goal 3 focuses on increasing participation in career certification and college readiness pathways and programs. This goal began in 2021 with already 49% of WPS graduating students earning one or more market value assets. A lack of information about these opportunities surfaced among all stakeholder groups. Thus, potential additions to the plan might include indicators focused on including more varied communication strategies provided earlier in the student experience and addressing underrepresented student populations in these programs. There were also suggestions to align this goal with the graduation rate goal, as participants believed all graduates should have one or more market value assets.
- Goal 4 is dedicated to establishing safe schools. To enhance clarity and transparency, the district should explore a broader range of data beyond satisfaction surveys when presenting a public perception of schools as safe and welcoming learning environments.
- The strategic planning committee should carefully review the individual recommendations fattered from surveys, seeking out unique and valuable ideas to enhance existing district programs, evaluation strategies, and other planning and improvement initiatives withing the district. While some recommendations may be tangential to the task of updating the Strategic Plan and modifying indicators or language to convey district priorities, they represent a rich source of ideas contributed by engaged stakeholders. These ideas could significantly aid in refining implementation activities that align with and support the Strategic Plan.

## **Key Findings: Data Review**

The data reviewed by CEEL aligned to the four goals currently in the USD 259 Strategic Plan.

### **Increase Graduation Rates**

The goal for WPS in 2018 was to increase the graduation rate from 74% to 80% by the year

2025. The graduation rate for the class of 2022 was 80.4%, so the district met its goal three years ahead of the target.

In looking at subgroup graduation rate data, there were several groups that made significant gains while others showed a loss.

Gains in graduation rates six percentage points or higher:

- Hispanic males and females
- Multi-Racial males and females
- Special Education males and females
- American Indian males
- Limited English Proficient Students
- Free Lunch males and females
- Migrant Students
- Homeless Students
- Pacific Islander males

Loss in Graduation Rates three percentage points or higher:

- Asian males
- Pacific Islander females

The subgroups showing the most significant gains in graduation rates were Hispanic males, Pacific Islander males, Special Education students, American Indian males, Limited English Proficient students, and Migrant and Homeless students.

### **Increasing 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading Proficiency**

The goal for WPS in 2018 was to increase 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency (Levels 3 and 4 on the state assessment) from 21.93% to 44%. This is an admirable goal as few districts in the state have achieved this level of proficiency. While 2023 WPS data shows 21.04% of students achieving this level at 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, in the 2019 school year the district saw that percentage rise to 25.2% in its first year of the goal but declined below the 2018 levels in the next few years.

The effects of COVID-19 had a dramatic effect on student performance in schools across the country. In 2020, academic performance dropped nationwide and WPS experienced the same drop in academic performance. According to reports from the Kansas State Department of Education, early grades experienced more significant drops in performance than higher grades. In the 2021 school year, 20.96% of WPS students performed at Levels 3 and 4 on the state assessment. Students at WPS have returned to the original performance levels of 2018, but there is still much room to grow.

When reviewing local assessment data across all elementary grades, WPS has experienced some of the highest growth in district history over the past few years. It is important to take local assessments into consideration when looking at student performance as local measures can add a much greater detail to overall achievement than using the state assessment alone.

### **Increase Certifications and College Credit**

The WPS school district set a goal to have 70% of their students graduate high school with a diploma and one or more market value assets, which are described as: Industry Recognized Credentials, College Credit, Entrepreneurial Experience, or Work-Based Learning.

The district was not able to begin measuring this goal in 2018 as they first needed to define what a market value asset was, followed by developing a way to measure it. WPS began measuring this goal in 2021 and currently 49% of their graduates possess one or more market value assets upon graduation.

### **Schools Trusted as a Safe Place**

Another area of focus for WPS is school safety. A goal for the district is to have an approval rate of 90% or higher from staff, students, and parents to be achieved and maintained in all safety categories by 2025. The CEEL had very little data on this goal to share with the stakeholder groups, due to changes in legislation that affected students participating in surveys. The survey used was the Safe and Civil Schools Survey sponsored by the Kansas State Department of Education.

Staff data were not available, but parent opinions were shared during the focus groups. Parent survey data generated the following perspectives:

- 98% of parents agree that they are welcomed and treated with respect.
- 97.8% of parents believe the staff make school a safe place.
- 97.9% of parents feel students are safe at school.

There was concern from the stakeholder group that there may not be enough data to inform this goal. The district may have additional information, but it was not shared during the focus group discussions.

### **Key Findings: Focus Groups**

Responses to the questions during the focus groups were collected with an online survey tool called Mentimeter. Participants logged in using their smartphone or a laptop that was provided.

The number (N) of responses reported for each focus group represents the number of participants who logged into the Mentimeter survey platform and provided responses. This number does not necessarily reflect those who attended the focus groups and did not provide responses.

Below is a summary of the feedback gathered from each stakeholder group. Each stakeholder summary below includes the group identity or affiliation to WPS, collected feedback on the current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended changes, opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways from these stakeholder groups, and perceived skills needed for student success after high school graduation.

### **Higher Education**

N=10

Higher education representatives spent time discussing and sharing their individual experiences in working with WPS staff and students and how these experiences related to the Strategic Plan

Goals and opportunities provided to students across the district. With their most direct contact to high school principals, counselors, staff and students, recommendations focused on the high school experience, although the attention to academics was at all levels.

#### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

Respondents were asked: *Do current WPS Strategic Plan goals meet our students' needs?* In response to this question, six participants agreed, and four participants disagreed; indicating that there were mixed feelings within this group. When asked what modifications they would suggest for the Strategic Plan, this group repeatedly suggested that the academic proficiency goal should have a focus on other areas of math, reading, and writing, giving special attention to subgroup and gender differences when measuring success. They also recommended that graduation rates should remain a priority and continue to raise the graduation rate goal to a higher level. Again, a large emphasis was placed on implementing strategies to address subgroups that are behind in all areas.

#### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

When higher educational representatives were asked about the current opportunities provided to WPS students, the greatest responses addressed the need to provide students additional support to learn and explore postsecondary pathways. Recommendations included partnering with higher education and community programs, hiring additional counselors and career advocates, and finding ways to better communicate with parents about student options. They also discussed expanding opportunities for students to develop and improve skills, strengths, talents, and interests that align with the opportunities available. Lastly, several mentioned the need for all opportunities to be equitably accessed by all WPS students.

#### Skills students need for success after graduation.

Stakeholders were asked to select the top three skills they would want every high school graduate to have to be successful in the future using the Mentimeter response tool. A Word Cloud was then generated demonstrating this feedback. The skills referenced in the center and largest type below show which skills had the highest agreement and frequency for respondents. For the higher education group interviewed, critical thinking was identified as the most important skill, followed by communication, time management, and curiosity.



## Community Leadership Groups

N=5

This group consisted of leaders in the WPS community that represented the NAACP, Hispanic Chamber, Native American Leaders, and the Wichita Asian Association. While it was a small group of individuals, they had a strong voice that represented a diverse community of students. Discussions focused on strategies to connect with marginalized students and families who may otherwise get lost in the system.

### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

When we asked this group if they believed that the current Strategic Plan Goals still meet the needs of students to be successful, all participants agreed or strongly agreed with this question. Regarding modifications to the current WPS Strategic Plan Goals, participants suggested increasing the focus on innovative communication strategies for diverse student populations and their parents when communicating goals to the community. It was also suggested that WPS should have more mentors and staff that diverse students can identify with.

### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

The Community Leadership group felt strongly about celebrating and emphasizing the importance of all options for students after graduation, including technical schools, associate degrees, and college degrees. It was suggested to bring leaders in the business and trade organizations to students who can visit about career opportunities. A unique strategy from this group was to ask students engaged in these WPS opportunities to serve as ambassadors for other students, including working with students in the middle schools.

### Skills students need for success after graduation.

When the Community Leadership stakeholder group was asked what the top three skills every high school graduate should have to be successful in the future, they identified self-awareness as the top skill for success, followed equally by several other skills such as perseverance, empathy, initiative (and more) as featured below.



## **Principals and Assistant Principals**

N=16

School level administrators discussed specific ways to improve the language of the Strategic Plan. Individuals shared implementation strategies they thought would increase meeting achievement goals in their schools or across the district more generally. School level administrators consistently expressed a lack of information about career and college pathways and how to inform and guide students and parents at the middle school level about choices they would need to make soon.

### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

Respondents were asked: *Do current WPS Strategic Plan goals meet our students' needs?* In response to this question, eight school administrators agreed, six administrators disagreed, and two administrators did not express an opinion. When asked what changes or additions might be made to the Strategic Plan Goals, the greatest number of responses focused on including language in the Goals or Indicators that focused on the full continuum of the school years and successful progression through them by students. This should reflect middle school explicitly, with goal language or indicators that provide direction and desired accomplishments for students in Grades 4-8. Related to these suggestions, administrators wanted to see improvement in all academic areas included in the language of the Strategic Plan, growth targets across each grade level explicitly reflected in the strategic plan indicators, and the goal for the percentage of students graduating increased from 80%.

### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

School-level administrators felt that WPS offered many graduation + opportunities and CTE pathways, but they had recommendations for better communication with staff and families regarding available opportunities, such as when or how students access information. School-level administrators mentioned barriers to access for some students including lack of information about what a path entails, or specifics about internships since not all schools offer all pathways. The school transfer process and lack of transportation were additional challenges shared. School administrators shared there was a communication deficit regarding information distributed or shared to elementary and middle school personnel in these areas, and many recommended creating intentional activities for college and career awareness/experiences to begin in elementary school and continue into middle school.

### Skills students need for success after graduation.

When the Principal and Assistant Principal stakeholder group was asked what the top three skills every high school graduate should have to be successful in the future, they identified self-regulation as the top skill for success, followed equally by perseverance, adaptability, and problem-solving.



## Teacher and Staff Session: Monday

N=14

Teachers and school staff in this session discussed ways to expand the scope of the Strategic Plan goals to include language focused on academic achievement beyond literacy and across the K-12 continuum. Their discussion and then individual responses reflected their “lived experience” of enactment of the current goals. For example, they discussed that the indicators are not reflective of literacy development before and after third grade. All teachers wanted to see themselves, their work, their grade or content focus, etc., reflected in the goals or indicators. Thus, middle school representation and behavior of students not reflected in perceptions of school safety came up among other topics.

### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

Respondents were asked: *Do current WPS Strategic Plan goals meet our students’ needs?* From this question, four teachers/staff agreed, eight teachers/staff disagreed, and two teachers/staff strongly disagreed. When asked what changes or additions might be made to the Strategic Plan Goals, a broad range of modifications were offered. The greatest number of responses focused on Goal 2 with comments/recommendations that included using indicators beyond the Kansas State Assessment, including elementary, middle, and high school literacy in the goal statement with corresponding indicators, and broadening the goal to be inclusive of math as well as literacy achievement. Teachers/staff recommended that indicators for Goal 1 (graduation rates) should also focus on the quality of graduates so that the goal did not encourage “passing students on” when not warranted. If Goal 2 and indicators were expanded to address academic achievement at all levels, this would strengthen the meaning of Goal 1 outcomes. While many individual recommendations were made to strengthen the strategic plan, it was clear that teachers’ varied comments reflected how the strategic plan impacts daily school life, from the amount of time spent on reading relative to math during the elementary school day, alignment of academic goals and emphasis from school year to school year, how the strategic plan informs what is considered a quality graduate of WPS, and more.

### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

Two major themes emerged from the responses of the teachers/staff in the Monday session. First, needed communication about college and career readiness and CTE pathways was referred to in a variety of ways. Families should be informed better/more frequently/earlier, students need

more information (use of social media and videos were mentioned), students need more information sooner (elementary and middle school) and Xello and other strategies should be more goal-focused and engaging. Secondly, respondents felt WPS has a broad range of opportunities for students and does not need more, with the caveat to balance career with college readiness pathways, not to overload high schools with special programs that might strain needed existing systems, and to just continue improving what is already offered.

#### Skills students need for success after graduation.

When this group of teachers and school staff were asked to choose which employability skills were most important for WPS students to develop before graduating, they identified accountability and communication as top skills, followed closely by time management.



#### **Teacher and Staff Session: Tuesday**

N=11

WPS teachers engaged in discussion about Strategic Plan goals. The conversations were focused on enhancements to specific goals in the existing plan. The teachers shared a commitment to the teaching of reading and the importance of the 3rd-grade reading proficiency goal. Recent LETRS training was seen as essential to improving student reading performance. Continuing the upward trajectory of the graduation rate along with market-value assets was another point of emphasis. Furthermore, teachers expressed a desire for more parent engagement to support student learning.

#### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

In response to the question regarding whether the current WPS Strategic Plan goals align with students' needs, eight teachers agreed, two teachers disagreed, and one teacher strongly disagreed. Regarding potential modifications or additions to the Strategic Plan Goals, most responses centered on the 3rd-grade reading goal. Teachers highlighted the necessity of elevating its significance as a foundational element for achieving other academic milestones. Additionally, they advocated for broadening this goal to encompass a greater emphasis on comprehension, vocabulary development, and oral language skills over multiple grade levels. Teachers also voiced a desire to raise the target graduation rate and enhance the percentage of students

graduating with market-value assets. Recognizing robust parent involvement as a pivotal factor in achieving these objectives, they underscored the importance of active parental engagement.

#### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

Educators emphasized the need to introduce awareness of CTE pathways at an earlier stage, including in elementary school. They believed that elementary students could derive advantages from early exposure to a diverse range of careers and becoming familiar with career-related vocabulary and CTE pathways. Additionally, some teachers proposed the implementation of a "CTE sampler course," organizing field trips to high school CTE classrooms, or offering other career exploration opportunities tailored to middle school students.

#### Skills students need for success after graduation.

When teachers in this group were asked to choose which employability skills were most important for WPS students to develop before graduating, they selected perseverance as the top skill, followed by self-awareness and self-regulation.



#### **Invited Parents and District Site Council**

N=35

A diverse assembly of parents and site council members actively participated in a discussion regarding the Strategic Plan. Among the various topics discussed, school safety emerged as a primary concern, with numerous comments shared in this regard. The group collectively advocated for heightened parent engagement and emphasized the significance of enhancing student literacy. Throughout the discussion, participants contributed a diverse range of viewpoints on existing teaching and learning models. Furthermore, parents expressed a strong interest in the district's commitment to ongoing career exploration and preparation but underscored the importance of enhancing communication with parents throughout this process.

#### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

Respondents were asked: *Do current WPS Strategic Plan goals meet our students' needs?* In response to this question, two participants strongly agreed, 13 agreed, 12 disagreed, one strongly disagreed, and seven did not give an opinion. Suggestions for refining the Strategic Plan goals encompassed several key aspects. First, there was a notable call for more comprehensive safety plans, with specific attention given to addressing student trauma, enhancing student mental

health support, addressing special needs, and ensuring environmental safety. Participants also advocated for increased opportunities for parental involvement and underscored the importance of improved communication to facilitate such engagement.

The third grade reading goal garnered approval, with participants endorsing additional support for this target while emphasizing the need for greater accountability when it is not met.

Additionally, some participants expressed a desire for enriched learning experiences centered around creativity and critical thinking, as opposed to an exclusive focus on career preparation.

#### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

Participants predominantly expressed support for the existing CTE pathways and readiness programs. However, their feedback revealed a consensus regarding the need for improved communication regarding these programs' availability. Additionally, concerns were raised about the transparency of the transfer process since not all programs are accessible at every school, and the absence of transportation options for students granted transfers. Other responses advocated for additional foreign language opportunities, honors classes, and basic life skills classes.

#### Skills students need for success after graduation.

These participants were asked to choose which employability skills were most important for WPS students to develop before graduating. They selected communication as the most important skill, followed by curiosity and empathy.



#### **Parents (Spanish Language)**

N=23

Spanish-speaking parents discussed their views of the current Strategic Plan. The language barrier and timing of this session resulted in several challenges. Many participants were not present at the beginning of the session and therefore missed the presentation of the goals and associated progress. The group shared several opinions about the district and demonstrated a high level of interest in district initiatives in relation to their children.

#### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

Respondents were asked: *Do current WPS Strategic Plan goals meet our students' needs?* In response to this question, three parents strongly agreed, seven agreed, three disagreed, and 10 did not respond or did not express an opinion. Regarding potential modifications or enhancements to

the Strategic Plan Goals, numerous responses centered on language-related aspects. Parents emphasized their desire for their children to possess strong proficiency in their native languages alongside English language skills to facilitate effective communication with others. Additionally, parents expressed a keen interest in fostering a more active partnership with schools, particularly in advocating for additional opportunities for student practice and additional challenges. Safety concerns were also raised, with an emphasis on providing students with a secure learning environment and effective channels for sharing concerns with school leaders.

#### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

Parents shared support for the current ESOL program and want to see it continued or even expanded. They appreciated the variety of CTE pathways and opportunities for college credit while in high school.

#### Skills students need for success after graduation.

Parents in this group were asked to choose which employability skills were most important for WPS students to develop before graduating. Perseverance was mentioned most, followed by initiative and empathy.



### **Community Partners**

N=28

The group of community partners included organizations that work with and serve student populations outside of WPS. These organizations included the Boys and Girls Club, Boy and Girl Scouts, and YMCA to name a few. As groups that serve student populations regularly, they were not aware of the many opportunities that exist at WPS and found that many of the students they serve are also not aware of these services. They were pleased to hear about the variety of opportunities that students have available to them but would like to partner and improve communication.

#### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

Respondents were asked: *Do current WPS Strategic Plan goals meet our students' needs?* In response to this question, 11 agreed and 11 disagreed, while 2 strongly disagreed and 4 had no opinion. Those who disagreed shared that they did not have issues with the four goals, but the

indicators under each goal needed more clarity and focus. When asked about modifications to the current WPS Strategic Plan Goals there was an overwhelming response around social-emotional interventions and support in the language around restorative practices, emotional intelligence, mental health needs, reaching the whole child, and conflict resolution. They suggested implementing a better communication plan to better inform parents and engage them as partners in the process.

#### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

This group felt strongly that students should become aware of the WPS opportunities at a younger age. Suggestions included having the elementary grades dedicated to the general awareness of these opportunities, middle school grades as a place for students to begin exploring different opportunities, and high school as a place for students to engage in multiple opportunities based on their skills and talents. This group also emphasized the need to better engage parents and the community in the process as many were not aware of the multiple opportunities provided by WPS. Finally, this group suggested finding ways to make sure that these opportunities were available to all students at WPS.

#### Skills students need for success after graduation.

Members of the Community Partners group selected critical thinking and problem solving, followed closely by communication and self-regulation as the top employability skills for WPS students to have upon graduation.



#### **Chamber of Commerce**

N=9

Chamber of Commerce members drew from their experiences with Wichita Public Schools as community partners and a driving force in hiring needs across the greater Wichita area. They frequently spoke of the need for employability skills for success and increased partnerships between WPS and the business and support community. Another priority discussed was the need to keep parents in mind and intentionally look for ways to improve communication and involvement.

### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

Respondents were asked: *Do current WPS Strategic Plan goals meet our students' needs?* In response to this question, four participants did not have an opinion. When asked about modifications to the existing strategic plan, the majority of the recommendations were around the need for students to receive employability, career, and life skills which they felt the current workforce is lacking. The Chamber of Commerce survey participants recommended that WPS find ways for teachers to share their successful teaching experiences with their peers. Many Chamber of Commerce participants recommended that parent communication and involvement be a continued focus for the district as parents/guardians are a key to student and community success.

### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

In the area of opportunities for WPS students, Chamber members most often spoke of increased partnerships with community organizations, such as Workforce Alliance, two and four-year colleges, and the business industry. They suggested that more career advocates and counselors could help with this goal, along with introducing students at a younger age to options through exploration and experiences. Chamber members again addressed the need for communication and social skills as a priority.

### Skills students need for success after graduation.

When asked to select the top three employability skills that every WPS graduate should have to be successful in the future, members of the Chamber of Commerce selected communication as the highest skill, followed by critical thinking, and initiative.



### **Open Community Session**

N=23

During the discourse surrounding the WPS Strategic Plan, community members consistently voiced their apprehension regarding at-risk students. Participants sought a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to students not graduating and were eager to learn about the outcomes for this group. There was also a notable concern for students who struggled with reading proficiency and those facing challenges related to mental health and socioeconomic circumstances.

### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

Respondents were asked: *Do current WPS Strategic Plan goals meet our students' needs?* In response to this question, nine participants expressed agreement, ten disagreed, one strongly disagreed, and three did not respond. Regarding potential changes or additions to the Strategic Plan Goals, numerous suggestions centered on providing additional support for students who may not meet the established goal levels. Proposed ideas for support included strengthening parent engagement, fostering community partnerships, enhancing staffing levels for students who are struggling, increasing the availability of mental health services, and improving kindergarten readiness initiatives.

### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

Community members acknowledged that WPS provided a good selection of graduation and CTE pathway opportunities. However, they put forth recommendations aimed at improving communication with students and families regarding the availability of these opportunities. Participants also suggested enhancing the career readiness initiative by incorporating more field trips and offering more paid internships. Also, there was a desire for fundamental life skills, such as financial literacy, civic engagement, and time management, in the curriculum. Furthermore, there was a call for initiatives tailored to students who are uncertain about their career paths, with the aim of providing guidance and support in their decision-making process.

### Skills students need for success after graduation.

Community members were asked to choose which employability skills were most important for WPS students to develop before graduating. This group selected self-regulation, communication, and critical thinking as the top skills for success.



### **Central Office Staff and District Leadership Team**

N=27

The participants of this stakeholder group, which included those most directly involved in developing and monitoring the Strategic Plan, had questions about awareness and equity.

### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

Respondents were asked: *Do current WPS Strategic Plan goals meet our students' needs?* In response to this question, one Central Office Staff/DLT strongly agreed, 12 Central Office

Staff/DLT agreed, seven Central Office Staff/DLT disagreed, and seven had no opinion or did not respond to the question. The most frequently suggested addition to the Strategic Plan was addressing chronic absenteeism. One respondent offered the language to “Reduce the rate of chronic absenteeism in high schools from 30% to 15% by 2026.” Others noted the need to get to the root causes of chronic absenteeism – anxiety, mental health considerations, lack of emotional and psychological safety while at school, perception of or actual non-inclusivity, etc. This topic struck a chord with this stakeholder group and had support as an addition to the strategic plan. Other recommendations that surfaced multiple times in the responses included addressing literacy in the goals and indicators across all grades (including middle school) and ages, focusing not only on student progress but also changing the trajectory of those students not on track; focusing on parents as partners and resources for parents/families; adding industry-based certificate programs; and focusing on mental health support for both students and teachers/staff. One respondent wondered why the goals were ordered as presented in the published plan and suggested reordering them to reflect how students experience them to: #1 Safe schools, #2 Increase reading proficiency (3<sup>rd</sup> grade), #3 Increase certifications, and #4 Increase graduation rates.

#### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

This stakeholder group expressed concerns about the student, parent, and school personnel’s awareness of the breadth of opportunities WPS offered. Communication about programs and pathways appears inconsistent throughout and across buildings. More information, frequent information, and repeated information that is both general and specific was recommended (e.g., parent calls, texts, emails, website information with pulldown menus for deeper levels of information as needed, student led information sessions, etc.). Increasing opportunities in the trades were also mentioned, citing an imbalance favoring college focused pathways.

#### Skills students need for success after graduation.

Central Office Staff/DLT were asked to choose which employability skills were most important for WPS students to develop before graduating. Time management, accountability, and communication were the top skills identified by this group.



## WPS Retirees

N=4

The small number of retirees in this stakeholder group discussed how the WPS Strategic Plan and the four goals reflected important constructs when viewed as interconnected. They shared that early academic success (reading proficiency in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade) leads to greater engagement in school in positive ways (safe schools) and awareness of college and career readiness pathways early leads to participation in individually identified paths to successful high school graduation.

### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

All four individuals at this session responded that they agreed with the current Strategic Plan Goals. Their discussion and survey responses reflect an awareness of how the goals are connected. For example, grade-level reading achievement by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (Goal 2) sets students up to be successful and graduate high school (Goal 1). They suggested starting career/college/post-school awareness earlier (in middle school) so more students might participate in CTE programs to strengthen the outcomes of Goal 3. They also spoke about wanting to include language about parents as partners in meeting each of the goals.

### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

The small group of retirees present at this session engaged in an animated discussion about how to facilitate greater participation in CTE pathways. The facilitator(s) captured some of the key ideas generated at this session. First, students need to be engaged earlier (in middle schools) in exploring CTE pathways as clubs are an important means of exploring interests and need to be fostered in middle schools. Secondly, Xello should be utilized more intentionally and sooner (in middle schools). In other words, students need to be better informed in varied and explicit ways earlier in their school careers.

### Skills students need for success after graduation.

Retirees from the school district were asked to choose which employability skills were most important for WPS students to develop before graduating. Adaptability was the top skill identified by this group, followed by sustained attention and time management.

perseverance    communication  
sustained attention  
adaptability  
time management  
self-regulation    self-regulations  
real world problem solvin  
teamwork  
integrity

## Students

N=36

The students participating in this stakeholder group were highly engaged in discussing how to improve the WPS student experience. Students had many recommendations on how to further accomplish the Strategic Plan's stated goals rather than changing or modifying them. This stakeholder group's discussion focused on students who were NOT meeting district goals and what the district might initiate to gain greater participation and satisfaction from students.

### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

Respondents were asked: *Do current WPS Strategic Plan goals meet our students' needs?* In response to this question, one student/Super SAC member strongly agreed, 22 students/Super SAC members agreed, one student/Super SAC member disagreed, and 12 had no opinion/did not respond to the question. Most students felt the current Strategic Goals were appropriate. When asked what additions or modifications might be made to the goals, students had recommendations on how to further accomplish the stated goals rather than changing or modifying them. Three themes emerged and encompassed most of the comments. The first, with most comments, addressed Goal 3: Opportunities. Students felt that more communication/information about opportunities should be provided earlier (middle school) and more broadly (high school). For high school students, they recommended providing better information about dual credit/college credit opportunities and ensuring that ALL students (not just students in AP and honors tracks) were better informed and encouraged to engage in this opportunity. The second theme that emerged from comments focused on Goal 4: Safe Schools. Students commented frequently that creating safe schools requires a focus on quality relationships between teachers and students. One student recommended changing Goal 4 language from "safe environments" to "welcoming environments". The third theme focused on Goal 1: Graduation Rates. Students expressed concern about the 20% of students who didn't graduate, that schools should address inclusivity and encourage students not in AP or honors tracks to take advantage of all the opportunities available.

### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

Students made many comments about the need for better communication regarding the opportunities for college and career readiness pathways available in WPS, as well earlier, increased communication. Repeatedly, they suggested that students could provide information that engaged other students. High school students could share with middle school students. Students could create TikTok's, YouTube videos, or other explanatory videos that could be posted for viewing repeatedly or when students are interested and looking for information. Student representatives from every pathway could share their personal experiences. Graduates of the district could discuss how their high school experiences have contributed to their current life experience. Relative to improvements in student participation in what the district offers, students recommended providing more pathways in every high school, citing transportation or the school transfer process as cumbersome as issues.

Many students suggested that the district offer a general life skills course or expand Xello to address life-skills as a means of meeting student needs for those uncertain about choosing a specific pathway. There were a number of individual comments as well as group discussion

about the role of clubs in increasing awareness of personal interests and potential future pathways, as well as providing opportunities for social/life skills development.

#### Skills students need for success after graduation.

Students/Super SAC members were asked to choose which employability skills were most important for WPS students to develop before graduating. Communication was the top response among the student group, followed by time management and problem-solving.



#### **Online Community**

N=591

WPS staff recorded a few in-person focus group discussions and posted edited versions on the website for community members to view over a two-week period, followed by responding to the same survey questions that the other focus groups answered. The survey was available for two weeks and many responses were given, although only 94 people viewed the videos that provided information relative to the WPS strategic plan goals. Of the respondents, 499 identified themselves as parents, 94 identified themselves as WPS-certified staff, and 53 identified themselves as classified staff. Forty-five were identified as community members and 22 as students. Participants were able to identify in two different categories as many, for example, identify as a parent and another category.

#### Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

There were exactly 500 responses to the question of how stakeholders felt the current WPS strategic plan goals met student needs. Of the responses, 244 (49%) agreed or strongly agreed with this question, 135 (27%) had no opinion, 121 (24%) of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 91 did not provide an answer to this question. When asked about recommendations to the WPS strategic plan goals, there were many suggestions around school safety and addressing student behavior, along with increasing the graduation rate goal. This was followed closely by teaching life skills to students and providing courses that would help students post-graduation. Participants also mentioned having more diversity in staff that could reflect the diversity of the student body and frequently mentioned that better communication between the school and parents could be improved.

When asked to respond to suggestions on current and future opportunities offered at WPS, respondents stressed two significant areas. First, they strongly recommended more attention and support for special needs students beginning in the early grades and pre-school. Second, they suggested that the district consider increasing support around social-emotional learning and mental health, including hiring more support staff and teacher training in this area. They also frequently mentioned making sure that there was a district-wide vision that was communicated across all grade levels and buildings

When online participants were asked to select the top three skills that they would want every WPS graduate to have to be successful in the future, members of the online community selected communication, financial literacy, and critical thinking, followed closely by problem-solving.



N=32

Level of support for current Strategic Plan Goals and recommended modifications.

Respondents were asked: *Do current WPS Strategic Plan goals meet our students' needs?* In response to this question, seven participants strongly agreed, 21 agreed, two disagreed, one strongly disagreed, and one did not express an opinion. Regarding potential modifications or

enhancements to the Strategic Plan Goals, English classes for students of other languages and student safety were most frequently mentioned.

#### Opportunities for College and Career Readiness/CTE pathways.

Participants shared support for the current programming and again mentioned opportunities centered around language, including adding value to the language spoken at home.

#### Skills students need for success after graduation.

Participants were asked to choose which employability skills were most important for WPS to develop before graduating, which resulted in the following word cloud. There were no repeat responses to this question. The English translation of the responses below is as follows: push, persevere, act, communication, leadership, solution, innovation, empathy, respect, initiative, keep your dreams clear, master the English language, speaking and writing, and sports games.

