



## **3D Strategic Planning**

### **“Determination, Dream and Destiny by Design”**

#### **MOUNTAINSIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**April 8, 2024 - Meeting #1 - Outcomes**

#### **Mission Statement**

The Mountainside Public School District is committed to academic excellence and providing an equitable, whole-child education for all K-8 students to ensure they are well-prepared for high school, and empowered with the knowledge, literacy, and social and emotional skills needed to be lifelong learners and shape the world around them. The District promotes a collaborative and supportive learning environment, infusing a comprehensive curriculum with 21st century skills that encourage communication and innovative, creative and critical thinking. It is our goal that all our students become informed, empathetic and productive citizens who are responsible on a personal, community and global level. The Board of Education, administration, and staff, working together with students, parents and the community, are accountable for achieving this vision.

#### **What are the Strengths, Achievements and Challenges of the Mountainside School District?**

On April 8, 2024, twenty-seven (27) Mountainside Public Schools District administrators, Board of Education members, staff, parents, and community members came together to initiate strategic planning. The meeting began with Mrs. Janet Walling, Superintendent, presenting the current “State of the Schools” report. Patti Rees and Jeanne Cleary from the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) were present, and Patti Rees reviewed the strategic planning process for the group.

We then gathered in five small groups to identify the strengths and points of pride in our district and community, and to brainstorm what opportunities and challenges the school district faces. Each group identified their “top 10” (or thereabouts) list of strengths and challenges for the district, which were then shared with the large group of all participants. Underlying all our work is the District’s Mission Statement.

The information that follows is the work of the small groups. As discussed with the meeting participants, all meeting outcomes will be listed in this memo and will be posted on the district website for the wider community.



## Strengths

## Challenges

### Group 1

- Rating 98.02% NJ Public Schools
  - Grants - finding outside funding
  - Cooperative efforts with Berkeley Heights
  - Cooperative efforts across the districts
  - Quality of the staff
  - Administrative continuity and retention
  - The Board of Education is involved with the community
  - PTO involvement - revenue streams and enrichment
  - MEA involvement - revenue streams and enrichment
  - Student - teacher ratio
  - Safety and security - pick up and drop off during the day
  - Specific interventions benefit students
  - Buildings well maintained
  - Buildings are a town center - fields, stages, gyms
- COVID funding is disappearing
  - Retain staff - salaries - administration and teachers
  - More communication and transparency from the Mountainside Board of Education to the public (especially those without students in the school) - mailings
  - Physical space - may need to increase
  - PEAK could offer more flexibility
  - Transition to school - Different procedures for the start of the school year - more gradual admission - help in finding classrooms - teachers meet the kids and lead to the classroom - "buddies"
  - More basic skills instruction early on for struggling kids to provide them with a strong foundation
  - Loss of ability to influence special education programming at the high school
    1. Consider Mountainside developing their own high school
    2. Perhaps other options for high school students
    3. Who can best meet our kids' needs?
  - Uncertainty of where our youngest students will attend high school
  - Expand opportunities for world languages - American Sign Language?
  - Additional academic period for LAL or math

**Group 2**

- Extracurricular activities- chess club, after school sports, tennis, continuation
  - Great new math/phonic programs
  - Noetic math competition access
  - I-ready progress reporting to parents, acceleration, and help
  - Beechwood math and ELA after school academic assistance program
  - Financial literacy class is great
  - Amazing support from community organizations like MEF, PTO
- G&T services expansion
  - Second language learning at an earlier age - Kindergarten and/or evaluate quality of current 3rd grade program
  - Addition of orchestra program, band and orchestra beginning in grade 3
  - Pay increases for all teachers, substitutes, and staff to make our district more competitive
  - Streamline all communication to a single platform
  - Evaluation of science curriculum and program grades K-8
  - Addition of cultural celebrations in the district, adding more diversity, equity, and inclusion to our curriculum
  - Maschio's- ability to make food choices restrictions, our kids buy too many snacks

**Group 3**

- Academics - Students being prepared going forward (for GL and beyond)
  - Teacher communication and cooperation between BH and Mountainside - provides a better baseline for students from both towns - hope that continues regardless of any staffing or administration changes
  - Community support (MEF, Watts, PTO)
- Provide better bridge from Deerfield to GL for not just gen-ed - but also for kids with scaffolded learning (currently requires self-advocacy which may not come naturally for all)
  - Concerns with administrative changes in BH that may lead to less coordination (articulation meetings) between the districts (related to #2 above)
  - Lack of variety of specials/electives offered in Deerfield
  - Budget:
    - leading to challenges retaining great staff and get subs
    - Transportation cost (impacts sport and field trips)
    - Dealing with funding challenges without sacrificing academics

**Group 4 - Did Not Meet****Group 5**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with Governor Livingston</li> <li>• Individualized Education</li> <li>• Class Size (Teacher vs. Student Ratio)</li> <li>• 1:1 Chromebook</li> <li>• Covid Education (Mrs. Walling)</li> <li>• Internet Safety Presentation</li> <li>• Film Festival/Noetic Math Competition</li> <li>• Test Scores</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology with Robotics Program (not as strong as Columbia)</li> <li>• Budgeting (Distribute)</li> <li>• Communication (Parent Volunteer Opportunities)</li> <li>• Funding for Theatre (Arts)</li> <li>• Gifted and Talented Teacher (Identify earlier and have the program begin earlier)</li> <li>• Equality, Similarities within the community</li> </ul> |
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**Group 6**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SEL ... can we build up further ...caring clubs?</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Curriculum coordination between districts</li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• SEL</li> <li>• Academic achievement/test scores</li> <li>• Staff retention</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Middle school guidance/only one counselor - more support (second counselor)--post covid, school avoidance – could we get someone from upper ed ... K-2, 3-5, 6-8</li> <li>• Global learning - gap...language education at Beechwood...expanded language opportunity at Deerfield? How do you engage cross culturally, bring in world</li> <li>• How kids work together in society driven by tech, AI and social media – how do we embrace and get ahead of it (i.e. the Westfield case); need kids to understand harms...environment where kids are aggressively educated - proactive ...</li> <li>• Community and civic engagement; cornerstone of curriculum - another generation of voters, citizens of the world - academic excellence ... educated decisions based not just on what friends and media say. Critical consumers of information</li> </ul> |
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**Strengths****Challenges**

- Indoor recess at Beechwood – better use of time
- Staffing - lunch aid/substitutes - could parents help in cafeteria? In Warren different parent serve lunch
- DEI/equity within education/curriculum - Summit Strat Plan - diversity, projects - world cultural day
- Food waste / sustainability / energy - Beechwood gardens, truly fruitful? Vegetables for schools– local landscaper support
- Curriculum coordination between districts
- Staffing for AIM and Gifted and Talented
- Staff hiring and retention
- Get more creative w local, state and federal grants – esp. post Covid

Each group reported to the large group their list of strengths and challenges. Following that discussion, through a consensus process, the following common themes were determined.

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Challenges</u>
Academic Achievement	Budget
Staff/teachers	Staff retention, hiring and support
Collaboration/coordination across districts	Increased basic skills and gifted and talented instruction and support
Community Group Support	Continued coordination with other district for high school transition

**Next Meeting: April 29, 2024 @ 6pm**

**Deerfield School**

**Thank you for your commitment to Mountainside Schools!**

**We hope to see you there—attend with a friend!**

*Thank  
You*

