



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF
PHILADELPHIA

ACCELERATE PHILLY

Strategic Plan Executive Summary

About this Document

This is the executive summary for *Accelerate Philly*, the School District of Philadelphia's five-year strategic plan. It includes the 5 Priority Areas and 63 Strategic Actions that the District will undertake between 2023 and 2028 to accelerate student achievement and progress toward the Board of Education's Goals and Guardrails. The comprehensive version of the plan is available at [the strategic plan website](#) and includes the supporting research for each Strategic Action.

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A Letter From the Superintendent

Dear School District of Philadelphia students, families, staff,
and community members,

I present to you *Accelerate Philly*, the School District of Philadelphia's strategic plan. This strategic plan prioritizes student and staff safety, establishes deep partnerships with our community, and focuses our resources on proven, research-based strategies to improve student achievement. If we work together as one united Philadelphia, we absolutely can become the fastest improving large, urban school district in the nation and prepare all students to realize any future they desire.



This strategic plan is the culmination of months of hard work and insights from community members across this city including students, teachers, school-based staff, principals, central office leaders, union leaders, community members, and Board of Education members. It will inform how we align our District resources, including time, budget, and professional learning, over the next five years. While these steps may seem simple, they require focus, accountability, and consistent follow-through. I would like to express my gratitude to those who contributed to this plan and look forward to continued collaboration.

Philadelphia is a special place. Our children have proven themselves to be resilient, and we are in a unique moment in time where we have the people, the constitutional commitment to resources, and the collective dedication to accelerate growth for all students. Now is the time for us as a community to come together to execute on a plan that ensures that our students are more than just college and career ready – we need to help our students realize the futures they desire. To accomplish this, we must prioritize our children by thinking differently about how all agencies within this city collaborate with the business and non-profit community, as well as parents and guardians to position our children to take their place as leaders in this wonderful city where the Declaration of Independence was signed. Philadelphia should be the place where the nation looks to see what equity and excellence looks like in action. We have much hard work ahead of us, but our vision for our future is clear and compelling.

My Listening and Learning Tour and the Transition Team Report made clear that we needed to rethink how we engage with families, partner with the community, and communicate broadly. This year, I have worked with a fierce sense of urgency and collaborated with our students, families, staff, city and state leaders, unions, universities, activists, grassroots organizations, and business leaders to improve the experiences of the children we serve. *Accelerate Philly* will continue to build on these initial efforts.

As a father, former teacher, and former principal, I know all parents have hopes and dreams for their children. Parents look toward schools to partner with them to help children reach their innate potential. We can accelerate our performance and place our children on a trajectory of success by focusing on a limited number of research-driven strategies and being relentless about knowing our children and responding to their needs.

Accelerate Philly is our roadmap to accelerating our progress and transforming outcomes for our students. Its implementation marks the launch of a collaborative journey towards excellence. This will be hard work, but our children are counting on us to create life-changing opportunities and outcomes for them and their families. I will continue to ask "How are the children?", and look forward to when we can confidently answer, "All the children are well!"

I thank you for the opportunity to work together. Our best days are ahead.

In partnership,

Tony B. Watlington, Sr., Ed.D.
Superintendent

Overview

Accelerate Philly is the roadmap for serving our students, families, staff, and community over the next five years and represents the final Phase of Dr. Watlington's three-phase transition process. Phase 1 began in June 2022, where he engaged in an extensive [Listening and Learning Tour](#) with over 3,000 people across Philadelphia to hear what the District does well, what needs improvement, and how we can work more collaboratively. Phase 2 was the Transition Team, in which over 100 participants reviewed the current state of the District. In October 2022, they presented ninety-one [recommendations](#) to guide immediate and future actions.

In January 2023, and in alignment to Dr. Watlington's commitment to "nothing for us without us", over 200 members of our District community participated in three groups that contributed to the development of *Accelerate Philly*. These individuals represented a wide range of roles at schools and in District offices, as well as the diversity of the District and every region of the city. They drew on their varied identities, experiences, and viewpoints throughout the process. These groups, in collaboration with Dr. Watlington and the Board of Education, engaged in a multi-stage process to develop *Accelerate Philly*:

- **Leadership Team:** 25 school-based staff, school leaders, and central office leaders that served as the decision-making body for the strategic plan.
- **Steering Committee:** 60 students, parents/guardians, school-based staff, school leaders, and central office staff from across Philadelphia that generated the content of the strategic plan, which was reviewed by the Leadership Team.
- **Advisory Groups:** Groups of community members, including parents/guardians, principals, teachers, school support staff, students, union leadership, and central office staff, who provided critical insights and feedback as the strategic plan was developed.

Drawing on the themes that emerged from the Listening and Learning Tour, the recommendations from the Transition Team Report, and the lived experiences of the individuals who participated in the strategic planning process, we identified 5 Priority Areas and 63 Strategic Actions. Moving forward, we will align our resources to these Priority Areas and Strategic Actions to raise student achievement and accelerate progress toward achieving the [Goals and Guardrails](#).

To reach our collective goals, *Accelerate Philly* must be implemented thoughtfully and carefully. A key consideration is the availability and allocation of District resources, including people, funding, and time. Therefore, not all Strategic Actions will be implemented at the same time. Each Strategic Action will follow four implementation phases between the 2023-24 school year and the 2027-28 school year:

- **Implementation planning:** Teams develop specific plans that include who will lead the Strategic Action, resources needed, ways to measure progress, and potential barriers to implementation.
- **Initial implementation:** Teams begin implementing the Strategic Action, regularly assess effectiveness, and make adjustments to the implementation of the strategic action before fully implementing it.
- **Full implementation:** Teams fully implement the Strategic Action and ensure there are enough resources and support for effective implementation throughout the district.
- **Sustained implementation:** Teams monitor the effectiveness of full implementation and consistently make necessary adjustments to the Strategic Action to ensure it can be sustained over time.

Equity, transparency, and collaboration have been central to the Strategic Planning Process and will continue to guide the implementation of our Strategic Actions. The following equity questions, adapted from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, will be answered at each phase in the implementation process. These questions will enable us to make decisions that center student and school community needs:

1. Are all stakeholder groups that are affected by the policy, practice, decision, or action at the table?
2. How will the proposed policy, practice, decision, or action affect each group?
3. How will the proposed policy, practice, decision, or action be perceived by each group?
4. Does the policy, practice, decision, or action worsen or ignore existing disparities?
5. Based on the above responses, what revisions are needed to the policy, practice, decision, or action under discussion?

As we implement *Accelerate Philly* over the next five years, we must hold ourselves accountable and be transparent about our collective successes and challenges. The Superintendent will provide annual updates to the Board of Education and the community on our progress. These updates will also guide future Board of Education decisions on policy, spending, and other needed resources to support the District in successfully implementing the plan. *Accelerate Philly* is a living document and will be regularly assessed to determine intentional, targeted adjustments to Strategic Actions as new lessons are learned.

Our journey is just beginning. Together, we can accelerate progress for all students and become the fastest improving large, urban school district in the nation.

What We Believe

The strategic plan Advisory Groups, Steering Committee, Leadership Team, and Board of Education provided feedback and insights to generate a revised District-wide vision and mission, core values, and a new theory of action. These elements will serve as the foundation for the strategic plan.

Vision, Mission, and Core Values

Vision

To prepare students to imagine and realize any future they desire.

Mission

All sectors of public education in Philadelphia will work with urgency to provide every student with the opportunity to achieve positive life outcomes in partnership with diverse families, educators, and community members who are valued and respected.

Core Values

- **Safety** is imperative to our work.
- **Equity** requires needs-based distribution of resources.
- **Collaboration** involves gathering and honoring community voices.
- **Joy** inspires active engagement and belonging.
- **Trust** is built through good communication, public transparency, and holding ourselves accountable.
- **Ambition** requires us to work with urgency to accelerate student achievement.



Theory of Action

When we focus on...

- Engaging with families and community members in the education of all students;
- Prioritizing the social-emotional well-being, mental health, and intellectual and physical safety of all students and staff;
- Centering schools and school leadership teams as the units of change;
- Advancing equity through everything we do and every decision we make; and
- Aligning our resources, trainings, and accountability structures to a limited number of innovative and research based priorities

Then we will reach the Goals and Guardrails and transform learning and life outcomes for all students.



PRIORITY AREA 1

Improve safety and well-being (physical, social-emotional, and environmental)

Safe environments are critical for our students and staff to learn and grow. This includes physical, social-emotional, and environmental safety. To make strides in these areas, our approach must be collaborative – including the District, the City of Philadelphia, and our partners throughout the community. As these Strategic Actions are implemented, students, staff, and families will see improvements in physical learning spaces, more consistent access to mental and behavioral health services, greater social-emotional supports, and an increased sense of safety in school buildings.

Strategic Actions

- 1.1 Establish a facilities master plan project team, including internal and external stakeholders, to identify a process and the investments needed to significantly improve academic achievement and to achieve Guardrails 1 and 2.
- 1.2 Improve management of environmental conditions and hazards by hiring a lead administrator and investing in a modern data management system.
- 1.3 Replace all analog security cameras at 150 schools.
- 1.4 Pilot and evaluate open gate weapons detection technology for stand-alone middle schools.
- 1.5 Expand the Safe Path Program in partnership with foundations and city and state funders.
- 1.6 Develop a bridge program for students transitioning back from long-term placement at Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center, Pennypack House, and other long term placements.
- 1.7 Identify, audit, and improve school climate programs.
- 1.8 Identify, audit, and improve mental and behavioral health services in partnership with the City of Philadelphia.
- 1.9 Recruit and retain certified school nurses for all schools to provide in person or telehealth services depending on student need.
- 1.10 Implement Breakfast After the Bell at all schools and offer sufficient, healthy, and appetizing food during appropriate meal times to all students.
- 1.11 Implement recess supervised by trained staff and aligned to national best practices for all K-8 students.



PRIORITY AREA 2

Partner with families and community

To live our core values of trust and collaboration, the District must foster trusting relationships with students, families, staff, and the entire Philadelphia community through transparent communications and frequent opportunities for partnership. Students, families, and staff expect the District to provide necessary information in an accessible and timely manner and to offer consistent opportunities for engagement to join in our work. Community partners expect clarity, consistency, and access to information to support relationships between the District and the Philadelphia community.

Forging strong partnerships and creating clear collaborative structures between the District and our broader community will enable us all to collectively support accelerated student achievement. Through the implementation of these Strategic Actions, families, students, staff, and community members will have greater access to information and timely responses, expanded access to enriching and well-rounded co-curricular opportunities, and new structures for collaboration with the Superintendent and District as a whole.

Strategic Actions

- 2.1** Launch a two-way communications system to improve communications with families and the community.
- 2.2** Update the District and school websites.
- 2.3** Launch a Superintendent's parent and guardian advisory group.
- 2.4** Launch a Superintendent's teacher advisory group.
- 2.5** Launch a Superintendent's principal advisory group.
- 2.6** Relaunch a Superintendent's student advisory group.
- 2.7** Launch a Superintendent's advisory group with external stakeholders and community partners.
- 2.8** Create a database of all District partnerships, their alignment to the strategic plan, and impact.
- 2.9** Relaunch Parent University to provide resources and support to families and community.
- 2.10** Establish a parent ambassador role (with paid stipends).
- 2.11** Evaluate and replicate successful Community School models.



PRIORITY AREA 3

Accelerate academic achievement

The District's primary goal is to provide the learning environments and supports necessary for all students to develop foundational academic skills and graduate college and career ready. We also know that high-quality, well-supported teachers and principals are imperative to our students' academic achievement, especially in math, English Language Arts, and science. As such, we must provide all schools with rigorous, standards-aligned, culturally relevant curricula and prepare all leaders and educators to use high-quality and inclusive instructional tools. Further, we can expand equitable access to various course offerings that fit our students' interests and goals, and create opportunities for students to receive additional support that meets their unique learning needs. When these Strategic Actions are implemented, all students will attend schools that enable them to succeed.

Strategic Actions

- 3.1** Inventory and improve access to high quality Pre-K programs for underserved populations.
- 3.2** Purchase and implement standards-aligned core instructional resources for math (in partnership with teachers, school leaders, and parents/guardians).
- 3.3** Purchase and implement standards-aligned core instructional resources for English Language Arts (ELA), with a focus on the Science of Reading (in partnership with teachers, school leaders, and parents/guardians).
- 3.4** Purchase and implement standards-aligned core instructional resources for science (in partnership with teachers, school leaders, and parents/guardians).
- 3.5** Pilot evidence-based high impact tutoring in 6 to 8 schools.
- 3.6** Pilot a year round and extended day school calendar in up to 10 schools.
- 3.7** Pilot learn to swim programs in different parts of the city in alignment with the curriculum.
- 3.8** Audit and improve compliance with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and expand supports for English Learners.
- 3.9** Provide more support to teachers in the areas of content knowledge, student engagement, and culturally relevant instructional practices.
- 3.10** Establish a baseline standard for which courses, programs, academy models, and co-curricular opportunities will be offered in all schools (Elementary, Middle, and High School).
- 3.11** Develop a project team to recommend optimal middle school design, programming, and facilities.
- 3.12** Appoint an administrator to identify, audit, and improve access for underrepresented students to Career and Technical Education (CTE) and building trades programs across the city in alignment with regional workforce trends.
- 3.13** Expand 9th Grade On-Track (Success Networks) to reduce dropouts and increase four year graduation rates.
- 3.14** Hire an administrator to better coordinate a district-wide dropout reduction strategy.
- 3.15** Launch a financial literacy module for all high schools.
- 3.16** Implement quarterly benchmark assessments to provide teachers, parents/guardians, and students with information about learning progress.
- 3.17** Reorganize learning networks to place resources closer to families and communities and to improve student outcomes.
- 3.18** Develop a "rounds model" for central office staff to visit schools, provide support, and debrief feedback.



PRIORITY AREA 4

Recruit and retain diverse and highly effective educators

Teachers and school leaders are the most important factor when it comes to student academic learning and growth. When educators feel supported, valued, and respected, they are more likely to stay in their roles and build strong relationships with students, which is paramount to student joy and academic achievement. Ensuring that all school staff members are well-trained and prepared for their roles allows our schools to prioritize high-quality teaching and learning, and cultivate environments that are supportive and nurturing to both students and staff.

This work requires intentional efforts to overhaul our recruitment strategies, reduce onboarding time for new hires, and implement plans to train and develop staff across all roles. Through these Strategic Actions, the District will intentionally hire and retain a workforce that reflects the demographics of our student populations, provide ongoing and relevant professional development, and create opportunities to attract and grow individuals who will serve our students well.

Strategic Actions

- 4.1** Establish instructional leadership teams at every school and provide them with training and resources.
- 4.2** Pilot recruitment and retention incentives for teachers and principals to reduce vacancies in hard to staff schools.
- 4.3** Appoint an administrator to audit and analyze staffing data to make recommendations to address long-term District staffing needs.
- 4.4** Develop innovative retention approaches for hard to staff positions.
- 4.5** Recruit more Black and Latino male teachers and principals in partnership with colleges, universities, and the Center for Black Educator Development.
- 4.6** Develop a teacher preparation middle college high school in partnership with colleges, universities, and the Center for Black Educator Development.
- 4.7** Expand “Grow-Your-Own” programs for aspiring teachers and leaders with attention to historically underrepresented groups.
- 4.8** Develop an aligned coaching and feedback model for instructional staff.
- 4.9** Provide ongoing professional development for non-instructional job roles.
- 4.10** Launch surveys that provide principals, Assistant Superintendents, and District leaders with feedback from their direct reports.



PRIORITY AREA 5

Deliver efficient, high-quality, cost-effective operations

To achieve our goals as a District and to drive progress toward accelerated student achievement, we must have productive and equitable operations supported by high-functioning systems, clear prioritization, and strong accountability. It is essential that we cultivate a high-performing, collaborative, and results-oriented culture that supports school leadership teams as the unit of change. When budgeting, staffing, feedback cycles, and data systems are efficient, transparent, and aligned, all other aspects of the District can excel. These Strategic Actions address gaps in our current system and will enable the District to better provide direct support to schools, create a structured approach for implementing this Strategic Plan with fidelity, and support alignment through improved processes for hiring, budgeting, data use, and evaluations.

Strategic Actions

- 5.1** Establish a system-wide project management culture to improve organizational coherence, execute the strategic plan, and develop a collaborative, trusted, and results-oriented culture.
- 5.2** Use Council of Great City Schools Central Office Structure audit recommendations to enhance the District organizational structure.
- 5.3** Implement a streamlined onboarding process to improve hiring timelines.
- 5.4** Develop succession plans at all levels of the organization.
- 5.5** Develop a project team to audit and make recommendations for student remote learning and staff remote work.
- 5.6** Develop a performance evaluation system for all Central Office staff.
- 5.7** Launch an annual school leaders survey to provide feedback about Central Office operations.
- 5.8** Extend the operating budget development timeline and use evidence-based budgeting practices to improve collaboration and transparency.
- 5.9** Review the school selection process annually and implement national best practices.
- 5.10** Recruit executive(s) on loan to advise the Superintendent and Chief Operating Officer on facility challenges and operational efficiency.
- 5.11** Provide the staffing, resources, and training necessary to meet school cleanliness standards.
- 5.12** Benchmark District performance against other large urban districts, utilizing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) from the Council of Great City Schools in: Academics, Finance, Procurement, Human Resources, Information Technology, and Operations.



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Learn more and see the full list of participants by visiting philasd.org/strategicplan.



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