

# Long Branch Public Schools Strategic Plan

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## 2021-2025

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# Background

The Long Branch Public Schools is comprised of three preschools, four elementary schools, one middle school and high school which serve approximately 5,800 students. This Monmouth County, New Jersey urban beach community consists of approximately 32,000 residents in a densely populated 5.1-mile area. The strength of the community is its Long Branch pride, multiple ethnic composition, resilience and the commitment that “Together We Can.” Languages spoken by Long Branch residents are English (57.7%), Spanish (26%), Portuguese (13.3%) and 3% other languages. Of Long Branch school age residents ages 5 to 17 years, 48.1% speak English, thirty-five percent speak Spanish and 13.5% speak Portuguese. The remaining 3.3% school age residents speak other languages. Although multiple languages present learning challenges, they are also reflective of the rich, widely accepted cultural traditions that transcend ethnicity and differences.

Of the total of 5,800 students approximately 13.4% are students with disabilities and 27.7% English learners. The district retention of teacher talent is excellent with the average teaching experience being 11 years. The student to teacher ratio is approximately 12:1. Both the community and district have experienced slight declines in population and enrollment. The enrollment decline was exasperated this year as a result of the pandemic. Challenges exist for student’s performance in English language arts and mathematics assessments. However, progress has been demonstrated with regard to student growth when compared to students in other communities with similar demographics.

The last district strategic review and plan occurred in 2011 as part of a transition in leadership. In January 2021, as part of another milestone change in leadership and the challenges of a worldwide pandemic, the Board and successor leadership team seized the opportunity to conduct a deep dive strategic review of stakeholder perceptions. Included in the review was an examination district perceived strengths, challenges, opportunities, and threats and an analysis of both pre-pandemic and current data.

From the stakeholder input received during individual interviews, focus groups and a community survey the diversity of the community and the acceptance of differences was determined to be a strength of this tightknit community. There is strong support for programs available to students, caregivers and families. There is clearly a commitment and desire to move all children to academic proficiency at grade level. Equally, there is a recognition that there will be healing and startup challenges as the district returns from the pandemic to a new norm.

District finances and facilities are solid and considered a strong pillar from which to build. The leadership team, the Board and employees at all levels are committed to work together to reach the next level of excellence for the children of Long Branch. To this end, the leadership team, staff and Board were committed to the strategic planning process and its success.

The initial phase of the strategic planning process was designed to engage stakeholders. This phase of the process included the Board of Education, administrators and supervisors, teachers, support staff, parents, students and community leaders. The purpose was to articulate the districts success, values, challenges and priorities for the future. Focus groups were engaged, interviews conducted, community meetings scheduled, and a customized community survey was offered for community input. Further, a diverse 35-person advisory group, representative of staff, the community and students, was formed to work with W. H. Adams & Associates, LLC, the consultants employed to facilitate and coordinate the process.

The perceptions identified through interviews, the focus groups, community meetings, and the online survey were analyzed. In addition, district data was collected and analyzed. Together this information was presented and discussed with the advisory committee. This phase began with a preplanning meeting on February 24, 2021, followed by individual interviews of all 9 Board of Education members, the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Business Administrator, Technology Director, C & I Director, Personnel Director, Special Education Director, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, LBSEA, LBSCA, LBPDA and LBFT Presidents and the Long Branch elected officials. These interviews were conducted between March 3 and March 25, 2021.

Stakeholder group meetings were held between March 15 and March 23, 2021. These focus group meetings were conducted with parents, teachers, support staff, business/community members, assistant principals and principals. The community online survey was launched on March 15, 2021, and was active through March 30, 2021, resulting in 1,224 respondents. Additionally, three community public forums were held on April 7 and 8, 2021. Each forum was conducted in a different language reflecting the three major languages spoken in Long Branch: Spanish, Portuguese and English.

In April 2021, an advisory committee comprised of community members, parents, staff, district leadership, students and BOE members utilized the data collected to inform their review of the districts mission and vision. Based on the data and perception information presented, the advisory committee modified the district's mission statement. The advisory committee also utilized the information to develop a recommendation for the district's vision. The goal for the mission statement was to more accurately reflect the district, what it does, for whom it does it and the benefit. The goal for the vision statement was to develop a preferred picture of how the future will look if the district fulfills its mission. The work was centered on four themes. The themes included the ability for graduates to compete locally, regionally and globally, student centered/life ready learning, social emotional learning, and applied/experiential learning. To this end, the advisory committee participated in 4 intense meetings between April 20 and April 29, 2021.

The following chart is used to show a synthesis of the process.

# Strategic Planning Process

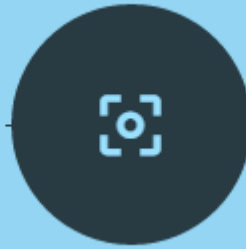
## PHASE I: Engage



*Document the current state of reality and the desired future position of the District.*

- Conducted 9 Board of Education and 14 Administrator structured, individual interviews.
- Conducted 15 focus groups with key stakeholder populations (370+ participants).
- Reviewed mission and vision of the district.
- Reviewed archival data and reports provided by the district.
- Administered surveys of key stakeholder populations (1,224 respondents).
- Discussed research and best practice around emerging themes from the Engage phase.

## PHASE II: Focus



*Create a framework for broad direction and priorities for the future in a formal strategic plan document.*

- Reviewed Stakeholder feedback and themes from Engagement sessions.
- Documented mission and vision, and the future direction desired by stakeholders.
- Initiate discussion regarding Portrait of a Graduate
- Developed a draft strategic plan document to serve as a broad outline to guide the future direction of the district.  
The strategic plan contains:
  - Mission and Vision
  - Global Findings
  - Strategic Goals & Objectives Identified & Prioritized
  - Two-year Action Plans

## PHASE III: Execute



*Document specific steps that will be taken in order to accomplish the goals and objectives identified in the strategic plan.*

- Facilitated administrator planning meetings to guide implementation.
- Initial Biennial Goals & Plans.
- Identified metrics for monitoring progress.
- Executive Summary.

# Global Findings

The survey responses, along with the participation in the interviews and the focus groups, are strong indicators of the support that the community, parents and staff demonstrate for the school district.

| DATA  | PERCEPTIONS                                      |
|---|--|
| District Demographic Overview               | BOE & Administration Interviews<br>(9 + 14 = 23) |
| Finance (Personnel/Organizational) Overview | Focus Groups (15; 370+ participants)             |
| Assessments Scores Overview                 | Online Survey Results (1,224)                    |
| Facilities & Technology Overview            |  |

Research & Articles

The consultant team based its findings upon themes that emerged from stakeholder and focus group meetings, individual interviews and on input gathered from the survey. The consultants also reviewed enrollment trends, student performance data, the district's 2020 CAFRA Report, technology plan and infrastructure, finance and facilities, personnel levels and the organizational chart. From the perceptions and actual data, it was clear that both the external stakeholders and internal stakeholders place a high value on the quality and reputation of the educational programs and on the students, who are served through the school district. There is a strong sense of community support, pride and expectations for the school district and students. There appeared to be both a need and desire to celebrate individual successes and/or accomplishments as related to both the students and staff.

There is a commitment to addressing and supporting basic skills and student social and emotional learning for each student. In particular, parents recognized the challenges related to learning loss and social and emotional adjustment that will be required as a result of the limitations placed on the way teaching and learning had to occur during the pandemic. There is clearly a commitment by all stakeholders to reach students where they are and to level the playing field for all students regardless of background or challenges. There were also comments from parents and some stakeholders who believed that the needs of students in the middle are not being fully addressed. To this end, there is a common belief and commitment by stakeholders that "Together We Can" meet and address these challenges.

Financial and facilities support and needs revealed that the district operates with fiscal fidelity and that facilities are well maintained. It is noted that some of the facilities may not necessarily be suited to the expansion of experiential learning such as trade and technical programs that may be pursued by the Programs, Pathways and Proficiency action team to implement the district vision.

Expenditures, student performance and operating practices were also examined and compared with other New Jersey K-12 school districts with 3,500 or more students. The data, perception information, the examination of district resources and



enrollment trends, was shared with the advisory committee. This information was used by the committee to review and revise the district mission, to develop a district vision and to review and prioritize goals and objectives.

As part of the process to analyze both perceptions and the data collected, the consultants identified overarching strengths (S), challenges (C), opportunities (O) and threats (T) to the district and the belief that the district will continue on a path from good to greater.

The SCOT analysis revealed that the diversity of the community and the community itself are probably the single most overarching strength of the district along with financial stability, resources, district pride and the commitment of staff and teachers. Challenges included the movement of all children to proficiency at grade level, parental involvement in helping their children to get to the next level, addressing the basic skill level of each student, and Long Branch pride versus the reputation outside of the community. Opportunities identified included building on the new collaborative communication culture birthed in the pandemic for both internal and external stakeholders and building on the new culture of “Together We Can.” Other opportunities included expansion and development of programs to provide academic, life and character skills for all LBPS students. Threats identified included defining the new norm, identifying student academic and mental health needs in a timely manner and the perception of inconsistencies across schools.

The complete list of strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats based on the analysis performed by the consultants follows.

## **Overarching Strengths of the District**

- Diversity. Diversity. Diversity.
- Acceptance. Acceptance. Acceptance.
- Long Branch Pride: Tight knit community.
- A community that cares.
- Dedicated Team: Teachers, Support Staff and Administrators
  - “Super Supporters”
  - “Go To” for resource direction
- Support programs available to students, caregivers and families
- Current Financial Stability
- Technology Infrastructure
  - One-2-One Technology
  - Security
  - Fiber
- Facilities/Buildings
- Ability to analyze data to make curricular and instructional decisions
  - District level analysis
  - Student level analysis
- Home-grown leadership
- Student Voice opportunities
- Early Childhood Center
- Social Justice High School Program
- Performing Arts Program
- Partnerships
  - University/Colleges
  - Library
  - Town Leadership

## Overarching Challenges

- “Parent involvement”
  - Multiple definitions | Multiple expectations – varies by stakeholder
  - Increase understanding of role in each child’s educational journey
  - Education of parents/guardians (ESL, etc.)
  - Consistent and transparent communication to ALL parents
  - PTA/PTO
- Move ALL children to academic proficiency at grade level
  - ESL Community
  - Covid Learning Loss
- Defining the “new normal” (re-entry)
  - Implementing the “new norm”
  - Educating/reeducating students AND parents/guardians as to expectations
    - Communication
    - Behavior
- Healing process of families as a result of pandemic (re-entry)
- Identifying individual mental and academic state (learning loss) of ALL students (re-entry)
- Providing or moving towards a more “individualized” or “personalized” educational experience to address equity and the individual needs, skill sets and passions of students.
- Addressing “basic skills” of students
  - Individual identification along a spectrum and appropriate for age group
- Long Branch Pride vs. Reputation outside of community
- Communication across diverse groups and languages

## Overarching Threats

- Relapse of pandemic lockdown either partial or total
- Community and caregivers lack of confidence in a safe learning environment to return to face-2-face instruction (re-entry)
- Ability to define “new norm” and communicate across district effectively for the start of 2021-22 school year (re-entry)
- Ability to identify individual student academic and mental health needs fast enough (re-entry)
- Ability to resource and address identified academic and mental health needs in a timely manner (re-entry)
  - Hire and onboard anticipated staffing needs
  - Implement policies, procedures, protocols and systems to efficiently and effectively provide needed resources & services
- Students’ dependency on “support” after graduation: “super support stops”
- Perception that students are “pushed” through education system without mastering skills and concepts
- Perception of equitable and inconsistent opportunities across schools, grades, and programs

## Overarching Opportunities

- Build on new collaborative communication culture birthed in pandemic: internal and external
  - Internal – further build on cross department, school, grade, content and platforms
  - External – Enhance communication plan with focus on community
  - External – Educate community as to communication plans
- Partnerships and programs that provide articulated “next steps” for LBPS graduates
  - Increase focus on transition and preparedness for life after high school regardless of the chosen pathway in career, military or trade
- Build on new culture: “Together We Can;” fall forward; it’s “ok” to make a mistake
- Programs that provide academic, life and character skills for LBPS graduates:
  - Integration of experiential and individual learning experiences and programs designed for academic, social and life success
- New leadership team in conjunction with pandemic slowdown
- Revisit/reestablish PTO/PTA
- Partnerships with local and corporate businesses that provide extracurricular opportunities, project-based curriculum and mentorships
  - Increase extracurricular programs for middle and high school (afterschool and summer)
- Continue to challenge approach to education delivery system
  - F-2F | Hybrid | Remote | Experiential

# District Mission and Vision

During April 2021, the advisory committee met on four separate dates to discuss the process, review information, and to review and develop a mission and vision. They also reviewed the current mission and vision and were apprised of the difference between a mission and vision statement.

It was agreed that the mission is a statement which describes the overall purpose of the organization and includes:

- What You Do
- For Whom You Do It
- The Benefit

It was agreed that the vision statement would be defined as a picture of the preferred future which describes how the future will look if the organization fulfills its mission.

The work began with big picture concepts that included:

- Globalization
- Student Centered/Life Ready Learning
- Social-Emotional Learning
- Applied/Experiential Learning

The process and the resultant agreed upon mission and vision statements follows.

## MISSION STATEMENT

**A mission statement is a statement of the overall purpose of an organization.** The mission should say what you do, for whom you do it, and the benefit.

### Mission Statement

Committed to celebrating diversity and embracing uniqueness, the LBPS family strives to educate, develop and support every student to become successful community members in a rapidly changing world.

## VISION STATEMENT

**A vision statement is a statement reflects the district's preferred future.** Vision statements describe how the future will look if the organization achieves its ultimate aims.

### Vision Statement

LBPS seeks to empower our students socially, emotionally, and academically for life and career in an inclusive, dynamic and innovative learning environment from PreK thru 12<sup>th</sup> grade and beyond.

# Strategic Goals

Generally, the mission of an organization does not change, but may be restated. On the other hand, the vision, because it reflects where an organization wants to be in three, five, seven or even ten years may change. Goals to reach the vision are usually crafted in biennial two-year segments with quarterly reviews and adjustments, annual assessments and modifications. Usually the goals are prioritized, and the highest priority goals are included in the first two-year plan. The focal point of this advisory committee was on seven target priority areas.

The seven major areas that surfaced as potential categories for both short and long-range goals and/or objectives are as follows:

- Social & Emotional Learning
- Programs, Pathways & Proficiency
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)
- Communication
- Student Life | Life Skills
- Portrait of a Graduate
  
- Defining the New Norm

It was determined by the consultants and agreed upon by the advisory committee that finance, facilities and personnel were not perceived as target areas needing focus at this juncture. Finance, facilities and personnel would be addressed across and within each action plan. Additionally, during the course of action plan development, the goals identified under the Defining the New Norm category were incorporated and addressed by the Social & Emotional Learning action team.

The goal setting process follows.

## Social & Emotional Learning

- Acknowledge and assess healing and support of community as a result of crises
- Identify individual mental and academic state of ALL students
- Increase student voice in their educational journey
- Identify and integrate programs to assess and address student, family, and staff stress and anxiety
  - Covid/pandemic aftermath
  - Academic anxiety
  - Economic anxiety
  - Other causes of anxiety and stress impacting student & staff performances and family support
  - Train/hire team
  - Educate and promote program(s) to stakeholders and potential recipients



## Programs, Pathways & Proficiency

- Programs that provide academic, life and character skills for LBPS graduates
  - Integrate experiential, individualized, and personalized learning experiences and programs designed for academic, social and life success
- Partnerships and programs that provide articulated “next steps” for LBPS graduates
  - Increase focus on transition and preparedness for life after high school regardless of the chosen pathway in college, trades or military
- Move ALL children to academic proficiency at grade level
  - ESL Community
  - Covid Learning Loss
- Address “basic skills” of students
  - Individual identification along a spectrum and appropriate for age group based on where they are
- Partnerships with local and corporate businesses that provide project-based curriculum projects and mentorships

## Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)

- Expand integration of diversity, equity and inclusion concepts into district culture
- Increase integration of diversity, equity and inclusion concepts into curriculum
- Communicate district-wide DEI program throughout and across district and community
- Develop and implement measurement tools to assess progress and implementation of DEI programs, policies and procedures

# Communications

- Development and implementation of comprehensive communication plan
  - Identify platforms/communication vehicles consistent across schools and departments to parents and caregivers
    - Explain, educate and train all staff members
    - Educate parents & caregivers as to plan
  - Build on existing internal communication across department, school, grade, and content areas
  - Communicate plan to community stakeholders.
    - What do they need to know?
    - Where do they go to access information?
- Ensure communication across diverse groups and languages
- Unpack and define the use of the term “parent involvement” in LBPS
  - Multiple definitions | Multiple expectations
- Reestablish/revisit parent/teacher organizations (PTO/PTA)
- Further involve parents in student’s educational journey
  - Increase understanding of their role in child’s education career
  - Education of parents (ESL, etc.)
  - Consistent and transparent communication to ALL parents/guardian
- Branding: Communicate district culture of “Together We Can”
  - Include “It’s ok to fall forward”
  - Capitalize on Long Branch Pride
  - Work on reputation of district outside of community

## Student Life | Life Skills

- Address “basic skills” of students
  - Individual identification along a spectrum and appropriate for age group based on where they are
- Expand middle and high school after school programs
- Expand middle and high school summer programs
- Increase student voice and choice in their education journey
- Establish and/or further develop partnerships with local and corporate businesses that provide extracurricular opportunities and mentorships for PreK-12 students and beyond.
  - Ask students what they want

## Portrait of a Graduate

- Refine definitions of Portrait of a Graduate Characteristics/Competencies
- Ensure communication of the LBPS Portrait of a Graduate to stakeholders
  - Develop graphic to assist with communication
- Ensure Portrait of a Graduate Characteristics/Competencies are incorporated at each grade level

# Top Priority Goals

The following goals are the top priority goals by category identified and revisited by the Action Teams.

## Social & Emotional Learning

- Acknowledge and assess healing and support of community as a result of crises
- Identify and integrate programs to assess and address student, family, and staff stress and anxiety
  - Covid/pandemic aftermath
  - Academic anxiety
  - Economic anxiety
  - Other causes of anxiety and stress impacting student & staff performances and family support
  - Train/hire team
  - Educate and promote program(s) to stakeholders and potential recipients

## Programs, Pathways & Proficiency

- Programs that provide academic, life and character skills for LBPS graduates
  - Integrate experiential, individualized, and personalized learning experiences and programs designed for academic, social and life success
- Partnerships and programs that provide articulated “next steps” for LBPS graduates
  - Increase focus on transition and preparedness for life after high school regardless of the chosen pathway in college, trades or military

## Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)

- Expand integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion concepts into district culture
- Increase integration of diversity, equity and inclusion concepts into curriculum
- Develop and implement measurement tools to assess progress and implementation of DEI programs, policies, and procedures

## Communications

- Development and implementation of comprehensive communication plan
  - Identify platforms/communication vehicles consistent across schools and departments to parents and caregivers
    - Explain, educate and train all staff members
    - Educate parents & caregivers as to plan
  - Build on existing internal communication across department, school, grade, and content areas
  - Communicate plan to community stakeholders.
    - What do they need to know?
    - Where do they go to access information?
- Further involve parents in student's educational journey
  - Increase understanding of their role in child's education career
  - Education of parents (ESL, etc.)
  - Consistent and transparent communication to ALL parents/guardian

## Student Life | Life Skills

- Address “basic skills” of students
  - Individual identification along a spectrum and appropriate for age group based on where they are
- Increase student voice and choice in their education journey
- Establish and/or further develop partnerships with local and corporate businesses that provide extracurricular opportunities and mentorships for PreK-12 students and beyond.
  - Ask students what they want

## Portrait of a Graduate

- Refine definitions of Portrait of a Graduate Characteristics/Competencies
- Ensure Portrait of a Graduate Characteristics/Competencies are incorporated at each grade level

# Executive Summary

The strategic planning process spanned a five-month period commencing in February 2021 and finishing in July 2021. The process included a review of stakeholder perceptions of the district, an analytical review of district educational opportunities and services and a review of district data. The data review included a five-year look back at district budgets, revenue sources, enrollment, student performance, community demographics, facilities and personnel.

The Board of Education's mission was reviewed and recommendations for modification were proposed by a broad-based committee of 35 diverse internal and external stakeholders. The committee participated in 4 meetings of approximately 2 hours each throughout the month of April 2021. The advisory committee also reviewed and proposed a vision for the future. Both short and long-term strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats were considered. For the long-term vision and planning, the discussion centered on the type of skill sets that will be required of current pre-Kindergarteners when they graduate from high school in 2034. The long-term vision was predicated on requirements across grade levels to move toward the achievement of the vision. In the short term, immediate steps were discussed for implementation of the vision for the class of 2022 and beyond.

The mission, which describes the district's purpose and responsibilities, was developed and agreed to. The vision statement which reflects the district's preferred future was also developed and agreed to by the group. It was further agreed that the district's current tagline would continue to be used. The tagline is as follows:

*“Together We Can”*



The agreed upon recommended mission is as follows:

*“Committed to celebrating diversity and embracing uniqueness, the LBPS family strives to educate, develop and support every student to become successful community members in a rapidly changing world.”*

The vision statement agreed to and recommended by the advisory committee for consideration by the full Board of Education is as follows:

*“LBPS seeks to empower our students socially, emotionally, and academically for life and career in an inclusive, dynamic and innovative learning environment from PreK thru 12<sup>th</sup> grade and beyond.”*

The next phase of the advisory committee work involved the selection of goals that were identified as an outcome of the interviews, focus group meetings, review of the district data and on educational research. The survey results were also used to identify and highlight potential goals. Further, the selection process included a review of current district goals and initiatives. The proposed categories/target areas from which measurable goals and objectives were to be forged centered on the following areas:

- Social & Emotional Learning
- Programs, Pathways and Proficiency
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)
- Communication
- Student Life | Life Skills
- Portrait of a Graduate

Twenty-seven actionable items were identified for the seven action categories. To assist the advisory committee in prioritizing the actionable items and to further define the categories into goals, a survey was developed. Twenty-nine of the original advisory team members participated in the survey.

After discussing and reviewing the survey results, the committee determined and established fourteen primary strategic goals to implement the vision through seven action categories/ teams. Social and Emotional Learning; Programs, Pathways and Proficiencies; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Communications; Student life/Life Skills; Define the New Norm and the Portrait of a Graduate. As previously noted, the Defining the New Norm goals were subsequently combined and addressed through the Social and Emotional Learning action team.

Phase two of the process required the establishment of six action teams led by key internal stakeholder leaders to develop action plans for the first two years of implementation. The action teams consisted of a diverse, broad-based representation of internal and external stakeholders with various backgrounds and expertise.

The challenge to each team was as follows:

- Define primary goal for each category
- Define secondary goal as may be applicable
- Identify objectives to be measured
- List action or strategy steps
- Identify metrics for each objective
- Resources needed
- Responsible staff member
- Timeline

From May to July 2021 the action teams developed action plans to fully implement the mission and to begin to achieve the vision. Each of the completed action plans is submitted in a separate folder. The following is a brief overview of each action plan and implementation challenges.

## **Social and Emotional Learning**

Initially this action team was going to focus solely on the healing process to address student, family and staff anxiety/stress that resulted from the pandemic. Wisely, both the advisory committee and action team took a broader approach to address healing and support of the community as a result of a crisis regardless of the crisis or its duration. To achieve this, the team identified two primary goals as follows:

- Acknowledge and assess healing in support of the community as a result of crisis.
- Identify and integrate programs to assess and address students, family and staff stress and anxiety.

The strategies and action steps are both reasonable and doable. Responsibility for accountability, resources and timelines were identified. Some work needs to be done on budgeting with regard to specific costs for the resources identified. Community resources were identified. The plan relies heavily on professional development for both staff and families. The need for benchmarks and assessment was addressed.

The greatest challenge will be the allocation of staff resources and funds for full implementation during the 2021-22 school year. This will be critical to the successful return of students, families and staff to the post pandemic new norm.

## **Programs, Pathways and Proficiency**

To create a culture of success for all students will require the full implementation of the three primary goals and two secondary goals/objectives identified by this action team. In order to impact student academic, life and character skills the secondary goal of integrating experimental and individualized learning experiences will require pursuing programs that are designed for academic, social and life success. Year one is spent in the research and examination of best practices in conjunction with a review of community and business resources for the creation of multiple career pathways. By the spring and summer of 2022 an analysis and decision-making are expected. Key to this phase is the primary goal for examination partnerships and programs so that next steps can be articulated.

Notwithstanding the forward ambitious steps outlined in primary goals one and two, this action team recognized the immediate need for the development of instructional plans to address learning loss as a result of the pandemic. The team recognized that addressing this challenge will require the establishment of a framework with a focus on grade level material infused with the identification of prerequisite skills and remediation techniques.

Although ambitious, the plan is solid. The barriers and challenges to success are recognized. Additionally, accountability is assigned, and resources identified. Achievement of this action plan will require the budgeting of resources and patience since many of the results of the first two primary goals will not be realized until years three and four. The timelines are both realistic and necessary in order to make progress toward achievement of the district vision for all students.

### **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)**

This team recognized and incorporated the rich culture, traditions and diversity of the Long Branch community into the plan and action steps. While somewhat initially hampered due to the timing of the release of guidelines from the NJDOE, there is the recognition that the work goes far beyond NJDOE compliance requirements. To build and expand on prior and continuing work, three primary goals and three secondary objectives were identified.

The primary goal of the DEI plan is to expand the integration of diversity, equity and inclusion concepts into the district culture. To implement this goal, there was a recognition that new pathways would have to be created for the dissemination of information that would normalize diversity equity and inclusion as an immersive and holistic community mindset throughout the district. In addition, need for community partnerships, multilevel communications platforms and messaging was recognized and is noted as a strength in the plan. The timeline as proposed for this goal seems to be elongated and it is recommended that consideration be given to combining the work outlined for years one and two into the first year. It is also suggested that the work of the communications action team as it relates to providing the opportunity for all parents to have access to a level playing field and for consistency in communications regardless of building or grade level be considered.

The second primary goal to increase the integration of diversity, equity and inclusion into the curriculum will require the coordination of efforts with the action teams for SEL, Programs Pathways and Proficiencies, Communications and Student Life. This may require concentrated efforts to address and/or eliminate any perceived or real silos.

The importance of measurement tools including the use of surveys as outlined in the third primary goal and in the objective is a key part of the assessment strategy. This strategy is tied to SCTP surveys sanctioned by the NJDOE which will also address the district comprehensive equity plan compliance requirements. As information becomes available regarding the surveys more specificity is suggested.

## **Communication**

The goal of communication action team was to establish clear and precise communication to/from parents/schools. The team recognized that information is being disseminated in multiple ways, but there is no clear or defined messaging plan. It recognized inconsistency both in the methods and messaging across the district including the central office and in individual schools. Based on this analysis the action team outlined seven steps as a strategy and plan to be followed across district and in each building.

Further the team identified seven implications for professional development that will ensure consistency and implementation of the solutions roadmap that was offered. Finally, the team considered implications for both internal and external stakeholders.

The focus of the plan is to improve communication with parents and guardians of students and to address breakdowns and anomalies that cause inconsistency and in some cases inequities to access. Further, the plan focuses on consistencies and messaging.

While there are some potential implications to current job descriptions there does not seem to be any significant financial implications.

## **Student Life/Life Skills**

The student life/life skills action team targeted three areas. The first area is centered on basic skills deficiencies and age-appropriate services. The target goal for individual identification and a spectrum of appropriate age group services based on where each student is; is both commendable and needed. The strategies are solid, but implementation will require a significant commitment to resources. The identification of these resources and budget implications requires further investigation and planning. The cost could be significant, but necessary if the district is going to be successful in meeting students where they are. The timeline as suggested is appropriate.

The second goal to further establish and develop partnerships with local corporate businesses to provide extracurricular and mentorship opportunities is well thought out and is doable. This may require coordination with one or more of the other action teams so as to avoid duplication and to maximize efforts. It is suggested that as the strategic plan/vision is considered in total that this coordination/leadership be provided at the cabinet level or higher.

The strategic planning process provided an opportunity for student voice as was exhibited by the significant number of students who participated in the survey. The opportunity for greater student voice and engagement can and should be seized as part of the new normal. An outstanding example of this engagement and involvement is the logo that was prepared by a student to reflect the portrait of a Long Branch graduate. From a messaging standpoint this could impact and inspire other students.

## Portrait of a Graduate

The action team took the five characteristics of the portrait of a Long Branch graduate that were identified by the advisory committee and developed measurable descriptors for each of the characteristics. The five characteristics include:

- Confident and Driven a.k.a. Confident and Compassionate Advocates
- Critical Thinkers/Problem Solvers
- Socially Aware/Responsible Community Members (Advocate)
- Adoptable Learners
- Empowered Role Models

Of particular note is the graphic that was developed by a student to reflect the portrait of a LPBS graduate. As the portrait of a graduate is implemented and promoted it should be clear in the message that the graphic is work of a Long Branch student and is reflective of Long Branch pride and excellence.

The primary goal of the action team was to create a plan to ensure that the LBPS Portrait of a Graduate is a district deliverable. The team is commended for its work.

The next step to actualize and implement the plan will require the identification of deliverables for each of the characteristics and subcomponents at each grade level beginning with preschool through grade 12. The exit skills at each level should include academic/basic skills, social and emotional expectations and life skills. This will require considerable curricular work and is a challenge that should be initiated immediately if the mission and vision of the district is to be achieved for every student regardless of where each student is or begins. A sample curriculum implementation document that was developed by the Washington Township (Gloucester County) School District has been provided to LBPS staff to assist with initiation of this next

step. This document provides a solid starting point to assist in implementing and achieving the vision for the portrait of a LPPS graduate.

Each of the action teams spent considerable time and members contributed their expertise in developing doable yet challenging action plans. Implementation will require a commitment that includes the governing body, the leadership and supervisory teams, the teaching staff and support staffs. It will also require parental, student and external community stakeholder advisement and buy-in.

The goals are ambitious, but achievable if they are supported by all level stakeholders. Resources will also have to be prioritized and committed to achieving the mission and vision as proposed.

The consulting team found that the Board of Education and staff are committed to excellence for all students who are served through the school district. Further, the Board is keenly aware of the resources and mindset needed to continue to reach the next level of excellence. The Leadership team and Board understood the need for the strategic plan/vision process and how the plan and vision could assist in the allocation and commitment of resources and the identification of future resource needs to achieve the vision for all students and families served through the district.

Staff were extremely cooperative in providing the voluminous amount of information that was requested for review. The consultants also found a dedicated leadership, teaching and support staff, who are committed to excellence. In particular, the consultants were impressed with caliber of LBPS students who significantly contributed through participation in the survey, as well as their contributions in focus groups.



Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the acclamation and learning curve of the successor leadership team and the new organizational structure significant and meaningful work was achieved. This is no small part was due to the commitment diligence of the leadership team to believe in and support the process.

Throughout the process the consultants tried not to interject any personal observations that were not directly supported by stakeholder input or from the data that was reviewed. Most of the recommendations that are presented for consideration, action and implementation are contained in the action plans, some are not, but are supported by the data.

These recommendations are as follows:

1. Adopt the mission and vision statements as proposed and finalized by the advisory committee.
2. Adopt the action plans for the first two years with the caveat that the status of action plans will be reviewed quarterly, based on the agreed to metrics and timelines that are reflective of progress and the commitment level of resources. This will also require additional work to be completed on several of the action plans relative to Budget, resources and metrics.
3. Be prepared at the conclusion of the first year to modify the objectives and to consider those objectives that were identified through the process, but not included in the initial biennial action plans.
4. To fully embed in the culture the mantra, “Together We Can” will require that silos be dismantled and that this theme is the standard for the communications plan.
5. To fully embed the Portrait of a Graduate in the culture will require the identification of academic/basic, social, emotional, and life skills for each grade level. Thus, this may drive modifications in the curriculum at each grade level.
6. To fully embed equity, diversity and inclusion as the culturally expected norm requires that the work become a part of each of the action plans and not apart from.
7. Communication and staying connected with stakeholders at all levels is imperative to the success of moving the vision forward. One of the initial priorities should be to get the communications plan in place and operational. Although not fully supported by the data, the governing body may want to consider a communication/community liaison position.
8. Each of the six action plans are interconnected with each other and will require coordination and commitment from the governing body, the district leadership team, building level leadership and buy in from all staff.

9. Professional development priorities and needs should be driven by the six action plans goals and objectives.
10. As part of every regularly scheduled Board of Education meeting, a brief update should be provided on one of the action plan primary goals or objectives.

The following are additional considerations presented by the consultants:

1. Based on both the level and diversity of stakeholder participation and interest, there is an opportunity to begin to further address the social and emotional needs of students as part of the early childhood education program.
2. For some of the action plan primary goals and objectives, the metrics will require further identification or defining of starting benchmarks and desired levels of success.
3. To fully implement the DEI second primary goal to increase the integration of diversity, equity and inclusion into the curriculum will require the coordination of efforts with the action teams for SEL; Programs, Pathways and Proficiencies; Communications and Student life.
4. Student engagement and experiential learning opportunities can be utilized to further develop student problem-solving skills and the application of knowledge across the curriculum.
5. The work of the Programs, Pathways, and Proficiencies action team has the potential to significantly increase experiential learning opportunities and student engagement. This will also likely have implications for curricular, facilities use and/or modifications.
6. Experiential learning and project-based learning opportunities could also be utilized to address the sometimes forgotten or missed students in the middle.
7. The power of student voice, through an examination of all current and potential options for student voice and input, should be considered as part of the next steps in the implementation of the strategic plan. An example of this power is the Portrait of a Graduate graphic that was conceived and developed by the efforts and work of a student.
8. The Board and community can utilize the work that was done on the strategic plan to guide the development of future instructional spaces, facilities modifications, and curriculum revisions.
9. The organizational structure developed and initiated by the successor leadership team in January 2021 has served the district well. It has been particularly effective for the allocation of resources and team members for the strategic plan/vision process. Given the work that was done on the strategic plan and the strengths and challenges that were

identified, it is suggested that this organizational structure be reviewed and possibly tweaked to specifically pursue the vision for the district.

10. It is recommended that the strategic plan and strategic plan updates be included in a prominent and regularly updated section of the district website as a part of the communications plan and strategy.
11. Although, the advisory committee did not recommend pursuing a separate goal under the category of finance, facilities and personnel, it is recommended that as part of the process moving forward the board and district consider a continuing assessment the following:
  - Review safety and security throughout the district.
  - Review special education programs and services based on increasing numbers of students and the impact on staff resources, facilities resources and budget.
  - Talent recruitment, acquisition and on-boarding of staff that are reflective of the community and student body.
  - Consider the current leadership pipeline for potential future assignments, retirements that may impact the districts stability and the pursuit of district initiatives. (Grooming and growing leadership capacity and succession planning).

## Next Steps

In the execution phase, the district will need to take complete ownership of the process. This will require the implementation of the action steps to execute the proposed goals and objectives and to achieve the mission and strategic vision. The action teams have developed implementation plans for the first two years. For the most part these plans contain metrics, action steps, timelines, accountable person or position and the stated required resources.

W.H. Adams & Associates, LLC thanks the Board of Education, the Long Branch leadership team and LBPS staff for the opportunity to provide assistance in the examination and restatement of the mission statement and development of the vision, goals, objectives and resulting action plans for the first two years of what could be a 3-to-7 year or beyond vision. Congratulations and Good Luck!

