

Columbus Public Schools



Strategic Plan 2024-2027

Approved 3/12/2024

**“BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF EXCELLENCE,
ONE STUDENT AT A TIME”**

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Executive Summary

The Columbus Public Schools has three schools under two buildings within in the district boundaries. Our elementary building (PK-5) has a current enrollment of 321 students. Our high school and middle school are located in a joint building with middle school being 6-8 with an enrollment of 180 and our high school (9-12) with a student population of 243 for a total district enrollment of 744. The need for a strategic plan is necessary to guide the district through the new accreditation process set by the Montana Office of Public Education, to promote continuous improvement, plan for funding the ongoing building grounds upkeep, support and guide the recruitment and retention of staff, and manage enrollment.

The Columbus School District is accredited by the Montana Board of Public Education and the Montana Office of Public Instruction. The district takes great pride in all of the curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular offerings made to students. These commitments enable students to become life-ready to make a successful transition from high school to whatever the next step is appropriate for each student. Additionally, a focus on providing a challenging, but supported pathway for each student has resulted in standardized test scores that meet or exceed the state and national averages.

The Portrait of a Learner/Graduate will serve as our guidance in developing and maintaining the strategic direction of the overall educational experience for students. The following shall be evaluated and considered by the Columbus Board of Trustees and administration in further development of this plan:

- What are the hopes, aspirations, and dreams of our community for our young people?
- What are the skills and habits of mind that our children need for success in this rapidly changing and complex world?
- What are the implications for the design of the learning experiences and equitable access to those experiences we provide in our school systems?

The following strategic plan makes our priorities clear, ensures full transparency, and will see measurable outcomes to hold us accountable for maintaining focus on what will benefit our students. The plan is proactive and provides a road map to create the kind of educational experiences we want for today's and tomorrow's children. A balanced mix of current practice and new initiatives can be found throughout the plan. The plan is comprehensive and reaches all corners of the district. Both academic and operational branches of the school district are melded together to create consistency in practice.

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Columbus Public Schools

Columbus School Board

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Karena Econom, Business Manager

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Strategic Planning Process Overview and Definitions

Columbus Public Schools Strategic Plan

This Strategic Plan is a contract between the school district and its owners – the residents of the Columbus School District. It provides a road map to create the kind of educational experiences we want for children. A mix of current and new initiatives can be found in the plan for both the academic side and the operational side of the school district. This plan makes our priorities clear, ensures transparency in what we do, and uses measurable outcomes to hold us accountable for maintaining a focus on what truly benefits our students.

Process/Timeline

The development and implementation of this strategic plan will be a continuous process. As of Jan 9, 2024, Superintendent Bermes has formulated a strategic plan that is found in the current accreditation process of our district through Montana State Statute. The components of this initial plan have been devised from the Comprehensive Needs Assessment Survey of the district's stakeholders. Moving forward this initial plan shall be vetted through surveys, data and educational requirements set forth by the Montana Board of Public Education and the Montana Department of Public Instruction by the assigned stakeholders and committees. These meetings with all stakeholders will evaluate and determine the effectiveness of current proposed goals in determining modifications to this current plan. Upon completion of stakeholder input, a final draft will be submitted to the Columbus Board of Trustees for final approval.

Strategic Plan Overview 2024-2029

Columbus School District uses a **Strategic Plan** to guide and focus the District. This process was launched in the fall of 2023 to bring more rigor to the process of setting goals; to ensure the wants, preferences, and needs of the community are well understood; and to strategically focus District resources. Key foundational pieces of this plan include the District's Core Purpose, Core Values, Goal Areas, and the Five-Year Plan which includes measurable District goals:

Our Mission: "BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF EXCELLENCE, ONE STUDENT AT A TIME"

Our Vision: Together, our strong relationships build inclusive, collaborative, and innovative environments that create agency and inspire a passion for learning, excellence, and discovery.

Core Values

1. Inclusion:

b. Strengthen our community by valuing people for who they are, nurturing our diversity, and embracing the contributions of all students, families and staff.

- Community and Family Engagement: We believe that parents and the community are essential contributors in the achievement of our goals.
- Climate: We operate in a climate of respect, honesty and hard work, recognizing the need to be adaptable and open to change.

2. Excellence:

a. Ensure all learners receive an exemplary education that is academically challenging and meets their social and emotional needs.

- High Student Achievement: We are committed to ensuring that all students achieve at high levels

3. Innovation:

a. Engage in forward-thinking to identify bold ideas that enable us to be responsive to the expectations of our organization and community while cultivating creativity, critical thinking, and resourcefulness.

- Decision Making: We rely on best practices research to guide our decision-making.

4. Leadership:

a. Grow all learners as reflective leaders with high levels of integrity who inspire others to work, learn and solve problems.

- Committed, Quality Staff: We employ and retain well qualified and talented staff members who demonstrate a commitment to the core purpose of the District.
- Fiscal Responsibility: We are fiscally responsible in the management and expenditure of all District resources.

Goal Areas

- Goal Area 1: Academic Performance - Each student meets or exceeds the high academic standards necessary for college and career readiness.
- Goal Area 2: Operations and Capacity Building: District operations, facilities and human resources promote an efficient and innovative educational system.
- Goal Area 3: Community Engagement and Partnerships: Columbus Public Schools has created an environment in which all education stakeholders at the local, state and national level are supportive, engaged, and contribute to successfully educate our students.

HB203 – Columbus Schools Open Enrollment Guidance

This guidance document is specifically designed to guide district decision-making regarding HB203 (Open Enrollment) that was passed during the 2023 legislative session. The philosophy and approach expressed below is to ensure that mandatory implementation of the open enrollment legislation within Columbus Public Schools is in alignment with and supportive of the District's Strategic Plan, particularly the key components articulated on page one of this document.

Columbus Schools Open Enrollment Philosophy and Approach Statements:

- The District is neither supportive of nor opposed to open enrollment as a concept. The legislation was passed during the 2023 session and CPS will implement the legislation as required by MT law.
- The District's core purpose applies to all enrolled students regardless of a student's District of residence. All Means All and the District commitments articulated in Policy #3610 - Student Success, extend to all students enrolled in Columbus Public Schools.
- The Columbus School District realizes that regular attendance is required to meet the academic goals and maintain academic proficiency.
- The District operates most efficiently (maximizing resources for all students) when school sites maximize the use of available classrooms.
- The District will manage open enrollment to help bring available classrooms into use with the following parameters:
 - Class sizes articulated in MT Accreditation Standards will guide classroom capacity in grades K-8.
 - CPS's consensus agreement of 25 students per section will guide capacity in grades 9-12.
 - Staffing (Recruitment/Retention) may impact the District's ability to open all available classrooms.
 - The District shall ensure appropriate classroom space is set aside and designated for Special Education, Intervention/Extension, Counseling/Mental Health, and expected/projected K-12 resident student growth.
- District policy and procedures for open enrollment shall be constructed in a fashion to:
 - Aid the District in timelines to establish who is leaving and who is coming as early as possible in the spring enrollment process.
 - Prioritize in-district students in timelines and process, and then consider out-of-district requests for attendance.
 - Prioritize applications from students whose parents are at least .75 FTE employees of the District and employees of the District's contracted transportation provider who are scheduled at least 20 hours per week to support recruitment and retention of high-quality staff.
 - Prioritize applications of students with siblings who are currently enrolled in the District as nonresident students.
- The District recognizes that the tuition structures in place via the open enrollment system established in HB203 do not fully account for the resident taxpayer costs associated with funding

Columbus Public Schools. As such, the District may also prioritize applications based upon the anticipated obligations of resident taxpayers.

Our Strategic Priorities

The Columbus Public School District will achieve its Mission, Vision, and Values through the fulfillment of its Strategic Plan. The following Strategic Priorities will guide our efforts. NOTE: “Learner” typically refers to both students and staff.

1. Learning Excellence: Columbus Public School is a place where learners are motivated to learn and grow because experiences for each individual are matched to their level, style, strengths, and interests. All learners are empowered, committed, and deeply reflective, and we work collaboratively to advance our knowledge and skills.

- a. Academic Performance
- b. Learner/Graduate Profile
- b. Standards Based Education
- c. Effective Teaching
- d. Personalization
- e. Authentic Learning

2. Personal Excellence: Columbus Public Schools’ learners display high levels of integrity, are well balanced (mentally, emotionally and physically), and cultivate an awareness and appreciation for others’ opinions, feelings, needs, and concerns. Learners embrace diversity among people, cultures, events and issues. We serve in the community to effect positive change.

- a. Multi-Tiered System of Support for Behavior
- b. Inclusive Practices
- c. Extracurricular/Co-Curricular

3. Environmental Excellence: Columbus Public Schools establishes physical and digital learning environments that are safe, welcoming, and engaging. We proactively identify and resolve any barriers to access and full participation by learner.

- a. School Safety
- b. Culture and Climate
- c. Digital Stewardship

4. Operational Excellence: Columbus Public Schools establishes system-wide operations that meet the needs of our growing and changing community. We honor stakeholder feedback, foster strategic partnerships, and create comprehensive, effective and efficient operational plans.

- a. Human Capital Development
- b. Partnerships

Learner Excellence – Academic Performance

Rationale: Columbus Schools believes that all students should be provided with the educational skills and concepts to be proficient in all content standard areas that can only be achieved with regular school attendance. Poor attendance is a leading factor in increased dropout rates, at-risk populations and poor academic performance. Programs to promote regular attendance improve academic performance and lowers dropout rates.

Objective 1: Each student at Columbus Public Schools will met or exceed the high academic standards necessary for college and career readiness.

Objective 2: Each student at Columbus Public Schools will met the attendance requirements of the district at each grade level in order to achieve the district measurable goals.

District Measurable Goals

Grade Level Reading Goal: By 2025, 85% of all Columbus Public School 4rd Grade Students will demonstrate grade-level reading skills by achieving a RIT Score of 215 or higher on the MAPS reading assessment at the end of the school year.

PLC Goal: By spring of 2025 all Columbus Schools K-12 will have fully implemented PLC's that will support the closing of the achievement gap.

Graduation Goal: By 2025, 95% all students in Columbus Public Schools shall graduation and will earn a regular high school diploma in four years.

Columbus Schools understands that academic goals need to be flexible and reflect the needs of the district's enrollment on a given year. The district's academic goals will be developed yearly and will be based upon areas of need for academic growth and proficiency in all content areas. Therefore, the district will implement and evaluated new academic goals on a yearly basis.

Learner Excellence – Learner/Graduate Profile

RATIONALE: The Columbus Public Schools believes that each student shall be taught the skills that exemplifies communication, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking upon graduation.

DEFINITION: The Montana State Content Standards provides the structure for teaching and learning and encourages the highest achievement of every student by defining the knowledge and skill that students should acquire at each grade level. The Columbus schools will use those skills of collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking to create a portrait of a graduate.

GOAL: Each student will provide the essential skills to meet the district's learner/graduate profile.

OBJECTIVES:

- Develop a profile of a learner/graduate that includes the essential skills necessary for each student's future success.
- Provide professional development for faculty and staff focused on the content and utilization of our profile of a graduate.
- Implement instructional practices that incorporate the essential skills identified in the profile of a learner/graduate.

PROGRESS MONITORING:

- The Profile of a Learner/Graduate will be created for each building with implementation.
- The professional development of staff will include yearly training on our Profile of a Learner/Graduate.
- Students will be surveyed annually in grades 9-12 to gather feedback on our Profile of a Graduate. (2023 Comprehensive Needs Assessment Completed)

Learning Excellence – Standards – Based Education

RATIONALE: Columbus Public Schools believes standards are driven instruction and that all students need to meet or exceed proficiency on the Montana Content Standards.

DEFINITIONS: Standards-based education is a systemic approach to delivering high quality, equitable learning experiences inclusive of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting practices, deliberately focused on demonstrating mastery of skills and understandings inherent in the standards.

GOAL: Deliver a high quality, equitable, standards-based education that is consistent across grade levels and courses.

OBJECTIVES:

- Increase all stakeholders' (e.g. staff, students, families, community) understanding of the components of effective standards-based education.
- Establish and maintain a K-12 curriculum review and revision cycle that aligns to budget priorities.
- Establish and communicate clear and consistent grading practices that are supportive of learning, bias resistant, and intrinsically motivating.

PROGRESS MONITORING:

- Results of achievement on standard based assessments will be updated annually and reported to all district stakeholders.
- All Board Policies will be updated to meet new legislatively guidelines on parent involvement in educational decisions.
- Curriculum Review will be completed as required through revisions cycles and reviewed by the board annually.

Learning Excellence – Effective Teaching Practices

RATIONALE: Columbus Public Schools believes that all learners deserve effective teaching that supports them in growing to their full potential.

DEFINITION: Effective teaching is the application of evidence-based practices based on collaboration and intentional, reflective planning. To optimize learning, experiences are inclusive of supportive relationships, clarity of purpose, and appropriate challenge.

GOAL: All educators implement research-based instructional strategies; inclusive of social emotional support, culturally responsive practices, success skills, and disciplinary literacies.

OBJECTIVES:

- Increase competence of all staff in implementing effective teaching strategies in all tiers represented within the school's instructional framework.
- Ensure all staff participate in professional learning opportunities aligned to personal professional goals.
- Expand our existing mentorship program to include more co-teaching and peer coaching.
- Build internal capacity to facilitate professional learning and PLC collaboration.

PROGRESS MONITORING:

- Annual Professional Development Schedule will be submitted and reviewed by the Columbus Board of Trustees.
- Professional Development Trainings will focus on effective teaching strategies and best practice to align the district's instructional framework.
- Continue implementation of District's Teacher Mentorship Program.

Learning Excellence – Personalization

RATIONALE: Columbus Public Schools believes personalization honors who learners are, how they learn, and what they aspire to do.

DEFINITION: Personalization is a relationship-based approach that provides learners with more choice in how they demonstrate mastery. Instruction is tailored for each learner’s culture, strength, needs, and interests – including enabling voice and choice in what, how, when, and where they learn. Personalization empowers exploration, practice, agency, communication, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and efficiency.

GOAL: Every learner has access to personalized learning paths.

OBJECTIVES:

- Foster skills and dispositions that support staff, student, and stakeholder engagement in personalized learning.
- Identify alignment and clarify or revise inconsistencies in policy, infrastructure, curriculum, instruction, and professional development needed to systemically support personalized learning across the district.
- Expand learning environments for all learners to include support that accelerate personalized competency-based learning (i.e. blended learning, flexible time, multiple learning paths).

PROGRESS MONITORING:

- Parental input on all educational policy and procedures before implementation.
- Annual review of all Board Policies and District Handbooks.
- 9-12 Parental meetings to inform parents and students of course pathways.

Learning Excellence – Authentic Learning

RATIONALE: Columbus Public Schools believe authentic learning experiences empower learners to develop agency, efficiency, and passion.

DEFINITION: Authentic learning allows students to explore, discuss, and meaningfully construct concepts and relationships in contexts that involve real-world problems and projects. This can take the form of learning trips, projects, capstones, internships, alternative pathways for graduation, or other learning opportunities that result in relevant and useful products or experiences.

GOAL: Every learner has access to a variety of experiences that facilitate meaningful connections to relevant real-life situations.

OBJECTIVES:

- Design and implement a model for developing authentic learning experiences.
- Collaborate with community partners to develop authentic learning experiences.
- Ensure that experiences are grounded in and connected to standards.

PROGRESS MONITORING:

- Develop a work study program with business partners.
- Budget to fund learning trips and materials for student projects.
- Professional development for staff regarding how to use different teaching and learning opportunities to reach students.

Personal Excellence – Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for Behavior

RATIONALE: Columbus Public Schools believes supporting social and emotional needs through a tiered systems framework is foundational to learning.

DEFINITION: An Interconnected System Framework serves to integrate School Mental Health and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support through the blending of resources, training, systems, data, and practices (Multi-Tiered System of Support). There is an emphasis on prevention, early identification, and intervention of social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students. Family and community partnerships are critical to this framework.

GOAL: All learners are supported through a continuum of evidence-based practices that promote behavioral and mental health.

OBJECTIVES:

- Establish and monitor a continuum of evidence-based interventions at all Multi-Tiered Systems of Support levels that result in early identification and intervention implementation using data-based decision making.
- Increase efficiency and effectiveness of Student Support Services (School Counselors)
- Provide professional development to meet the social and emotional needs of all staff and students.
- Engage community collaborators in supporting schools in promotion of behavioral and mental health for all learners.

PROGRESS MONITORING:

- Analyze behavior incident data.
- Analyze K-12 assessment data annually.
- Monitor the development of partnerships with outside entities.
- MTSS-B procedures or protocol systems are implemented to decrease disruptions of the learning environment due to behavior challenges.

Personal Excellence – Extracurricular/Co-Curricular

RATIONALE: Columbus Public Schools believes all students deserve extracurricular/co-curricular experiences that facilitate exploration of interests and passion in order to enhance school experience and build life skills.

DEFINITION: Extra/Co-curricular activities provide additional opportunities to support and reinforce learner skills and understandings through passion driven participation in teams, clubs, and specialized courses both in and outside school.

GOAL: All learners have diverse opportunities to participate in or lead activities that enhance their experience.

OBJECTIVES:

- Provide diverse and relevant opportunities for all students to experience success in activities.
- Improve communications and outreach to inform parents and students about activities.
- Provide leadership training to coaches, advisors, and students involved in activities.

PROGRESS MONITORING:

- Annual report to the board regarding participation rates for all extra-curricular and co-curricular activities.
- Board Budgeted Funds to support extra-curricular and co-curricular activities.
- Student and Coach/Sponsor surveys

Environmental Excellence – Safety

RATIONALE: Columbus Public Schools believes safe environments are foundational for all students, staff, and community members to thrive at school and in the community.

DEFINITION: Safe environments are free from harassment, violence, bullying, drugs, and harm in order to ensure students, staff, and visitors are physically, emotionally, academically, and socially supported. School safety includes building solid relationships with students and first responders, reporting threatening behavior to identify threats, physical hardening of buildings with regular safety inspections, and regular training and drills to support emergency response.

GOAL: All learners are physically, emotionally, academically, and socially safe.

OBJECTIVES:

- Increase collaboration on safety between internal and external departments.
- Establish a cross departmental team from student support services, special education, safety, administration, and teachers.
- Design a continuum of safety supports and training for all learners.
- Develop and train all stakeholders on safety process and procedures including safety mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.
- Improve communication to all stakeholders on safety processes and procedures.

PROGRESS MONITORING:

- Formation of a Safety Committee to include an array of district stakeholders and first responders.
- Maintain SRO program.
- Annual Review and Approval of District Safety and Crisis Plan by Board
- Quarterly Safety Committee Meetings

Environmental Excellence – Culture and Climate

RATIONAL: Columbus Public Schools believes all our stakeholders deserve to learn, work, and have meaningful educational experiences in safe, welcoming, and nurturing environments which allow them to reach high academic standards and peak personal potential.

DEFINITION: A positive school culture and climate is the foundation for supportive relationships among staff, students, and parents. School culture is a group's shared beliefs, customs, and behavior. School climate is the "feel" of the school environment and how people perceive their relationship with the school.

GOAL: All stakeholders contribute to and benefit from welcoming and supportive environments.

OBJECTIVES:

- Identify and implement strategies to foster welcoming and supportive school environments.
- Create experiences for all learners which instill joy and celebrate success.
- Create school culture proficiency plans to help stakeholders interact effectively in our diverse community.
- Implement leadership opportunities for all learners.
- Increase family engagement

PROGRESS MONITORING:

- Conduct Annual Stakeholder Surveys on School Culture and Climate.
- A plan to further engage families will be developed and implemented.

Environmental Excellence – Digital Stewardship

RATIONALE: Columbus Public Schools believes developing digitally fluent learners is vital to navigating and contributing to the technological world in which we live, work, create, and communicate.

DEFINITION: Digital stewardship is the obligation of all learners to be positive digital citizens and to manage their online environments. Digital environments are used with sophisticated intent to accelerate and improve the educational system. An education in and practice of high levels of digital citizenship, online safety, data security, data use for decision making, and information literacy skills are vital to digital stewardship.

GOAL: All learners have the tools, skills, and behaviors to positively contribute in digital environments.

OBJECTIVES:

- Set clear expectations for data use and security in the district; ensuring the highest quality of data-driven decisions.
- Develop best practices and procedures for monitoring, re-teaching, and promoting digital stewardship for all learners.
- Increase school/family communication on expectations for data use and digital citizenship.

PROGRESS MONITORING:

- Development and future implementation of a Districtwide Technology Plan to include digital stewardship.
- Professional development calendar shall include digital stewardship training for staff.
- Student trainings of technology conduct and purpose.

Operational Excellence – Human Capital Development

RATIONALE: Columbus Public Schools believes in developing human capital where employees can learn and apply ideas and acquire new competencies, behaviors, and attitudes that align with our foundational values.

DEFINITION: Human capital development serves to position the district as a sought-after choice for employment. It is a system to implement and improve human capital decisions, recruitment strategies, hiring and onboarding, retention, professional development, mentoring, evaluation processes and compensation, and benefit packages.

GOAL: Recruit, hire, develop, and retain a diverse and premier workforce.

OBJECTIVES:

- Develop processes and partnerships for recruitment and hiring.
- Develop an evaluation growth model that encompasses CPS values.
- Streamline and connect human resources processes from hiring to retirement.

PROGRESS MONITORING:

- Data collection on state compensation comparisons for all positions.
- Offer competitive salary opportunities

Operational Excellence – Partnerships

RATIONALE: Columbus Public Schools believes collaborative partnerships with the community enhance and enrich experiences for learners.

DEFINITION: Partnerships include the formal and informal community connections, collaborative projects, and relationships that advance a school’s learning goals.

GOAL: Create and refine our partnerships based on the mutually beneficial interests of CPS and other agencies, citizens, and private-sector companies.

OBJECTIVES:

- Expand the Columbus Public Schools Foundation and its service to benefit all learners.
- Develop partnerships with providers aimed at establishing a continuum of services and wellness, school-based behavioral and mental health.
- Promote and market the CPS Mission, Vision, Values, and Strategic Plan as means to create collaborative partnerships and enhance district operations and learning experiences for all learners.

PROGRESS MONITORING:

- Develop and Market District Mission and Vision Statements.
- Maintain District Partnership with parental groups such as PAWS with quarterly meeting.

Strategic Plan Measures and Evaluation

The strategic plan will be evaluated for continuous improvement during the school year. Specific measures will be identified through the operationalizing of his plan during the 24-25 school year will include:

- Coherent Governance – School Board Operational Expectations and Results
- Montana Content Standards and School Accreditation Measures
- High Reliability School Framework – Indicators (Data Measures)

This strategy will allow all Columbus School Administrators and their buildings the opportunity to make significant contributions to the overall Strategic Plan and how it is measured. Once measures are gathered and collaboratively established, CPS will revisit this plan annually to review progress and measures. It is essential that the indicators of progress take the form of either qualitative and quantitative metrics or both.