



Bexley City School District Strategic Plan 2023-2026 Phase I Report - Overview and Analysis of Responses With Recommendations

Part 1 - Introduction and Overview

This fall, the Bexley City School District (BCSD) embarked on a year-long, three-phase process to create a Strategic Plan that identifies and begins to address areas for growth and improvement for the 2023 through 2026 school years. This report summarizes the findings from the first phase of the process, which focused on clarifying the current lived story of the district as told by a diverse group of students, faculty, staff, parents, board, and community members. It also articulates recommended next steps for Phases II and III.

In Phase I, BCSD, in collaboration with the Big Questions Institute (BQI), designed and developed a protocol and a process centered around collecting answers to three focus questions:

What are BCSD's strengths?

What are the challenges and obstacles that BCSD is currently facing?

What are the opportunities BCSD has as it moves into the future?

To gather representative responses to these questions, BCSD and BQI engaged in extensive outreach across the City of Bexley and within the school community to invite members to share their reflections and experiences. These efforts included:

- Creating a Superintendent’s Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SSPAC) made up of students, faculty, staff, parents, leadership, board and community members to reflect on and inform every phase of the project
- Sending a postcard to every Bexley City address with details on how to get more information about the project, ways to give feedback, and to invite participation in any one of six public community meetings held in October and November
- Creating a “Championing Our Future” Website with details, FAQs, and videos describing the project and inviting participation
- Creating ongoing information updates in nine weekly district newsletters
- Creating ongoing Information updates in nine weekly school newsletters sent by each principal
- Publishing a feedback form for questions, comments, or reflections open to all in the district and community
- A phone call to all parents from the Superintendent on Oct. 19 to encourage attendance at the first community forum and upcoming conversations
- Frequent outreach from school principals to encourage participation in community sessions

These outreach and communications efforts, carried out by district, school, and community leaders, students, parent volunteers, and others, were guided by a commitment to listen to and elevate a range of voices in the entire Bexley community, including those whose experiences may have been unheard or overlooked over the years.

Building on those efforts, from October through December, BQI conducted a series of 23, hour-long focus group sessions, both virtually and in person, with a variety of

constituency groups that centered on collecting responses to the three questions above. These groups included:

- Six (6) community conversations open to the entire community with parents, alumni, and other Bexley residents present
- Administrative leadership in every school building and at the district level
- Individual school board members, community leaders, individual administrators, instructional leaders, representatives from the OAPSE Classified Employee Union, and other groups
- Bexley Parent Minority Alliance, PTO, and booster groups
- A sampling of 4th and 5th Graders at Cassingham, Montrose, and Maryland Elementary Schools (separate sessions for each school)
- A randomly selected sampling of about 10% of middle school students
- High school seniors plus three (3) additional high school student focus groups
- Staff from each of the school buildings
- The Superintendent's Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (made up of students, faculty, staff, parents, and community members)

Those sessions engaged more than 450 staff, students, faculty, alumni, parents, and community members and generated over 3,050 responses. (Links to all responses are available on the BCSD website.)

In addition to the focus groups, BQI collected state demographic and graduation data, state survey data on student health and wellness, in-house school survey responses, and other research to provide context for the focus group responses. Finally, BCSD posted an online feedback form for anyone in the school and community to provide additional reflections, feedback, or questions as well as a second form specifically for alumni to share their stories.

This report reflects the story that emerges from the responses, research, conversations, and feedback that were collected throughout the three-month process. Wherever possible, the themes that emerged were examined and further probed in an effort to represent a full range of perspectives. Ultimately, this process uncovered topics and themes consistently expressed throughout the Bexley school community, which are articulated in the next section.

This report also serves as a launching point for continued conversations and deliberations in Phases II and III, work that will determine the strategic direction BCSD pursues over the next three years and into the future. It also includes four recommended focus areas that have been identified by an analysis of the Phase I responses and will serve as starting points for deeper reflection and discussion to develop the foundation for the strategic plan. The Phase II and III processes, which will be driven by members of the Bexley school community, are articulated below.

While Phase I is now completed, that does not close the door to continued listening, reflection, and discussion about the lived story in the Bexley school community and about its potential pathways forward. Those interactions will continue throughout the development of the strategic plan.

Part 2: Learning from Strengths, Obstacles/Challenges, and Opportunities

An analysis of the 3,000+ responses to the Strengths, Obstacles/Challenges, and Opportunities (SOCO) inquiry frame revealed key themes and ideas which emerged across broad constituencies for each question, including many areas of strength as well as other areas for growth.

Thanks to a long legacy of hard-working, professional, and skilled faculty and staff dedicated to the success of students in academics, arts, and athletics, a highly engaged student body and their families, and a sense of civic and community pride, the Bexley City Schools strategic planning process is commencing from a strong position across schools, stakeholders, and issue areas. BCSD's strengths encompass many areas including its rigorous academics, close-knit, supportive and engaged community, and its dedication to every student's success across elementary, middle, and high school. Strengths identified throughout Phase I were consistent from one constituency group (e.g., students, teachers, parents) to the next and illuminated the reasons many families choose to live in Bexley and send their children to Bexley City schools.

The fact that the district has begun a transparent and reflective process to fuel the new strategic plan is a reflection of the strong position on which it is engaging in the planning process, and its commitment to providing an education that is relevant and responsive to the needs of a changing world and global workforce.

The honest identification of obstacles and challenges across groups spoke to the high potential for problem-solving and reinforced the dedication to community, belonging, continuous learning, and well-being across diverse groups. In many cases, the challenges that surfaced are not unique to Bexley, and represent national and international trends. At the same time, some of the challenges emanate from practices and systems that are rooted in experiences specific to the district.

The analysis of responses (all of which are linked at the [“Championing Our Future”](#) page) identified four key areas of focus to explore in depth in Phase II and Phase III of the process, and which will form the core recommendations included in the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan. These four focus areas, articulated below, have the most urgency and, importantly, also the most potential impact on the strategic plan. Each of the focus areas combines a number of related threads within the data collected under more generalized headings, which are:

- Teaching and Learning
- Facilities
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Culture

It’s important to note that while each of these areas is clearly separate from one another, each theme is also a thread in all of the others. For example, facilities discussions cannot ignore issues of equity, culture, and classroom practice. Similarly, teaching and learning conversations must have an equity lens, as well as an understanding of school cultures, etc. As explained below in the details provided for Phase II of the process, a Steering Committee will be created to avoid redundancy and ensure coordination among these focus area discussions. In addition, by design, each of the suggested subcommittees has the potential to impact and benefit every member of the Bexley community.

Part 3: Recommended Subcommittees for Further Discussion

Following the review of this report and an analysis of the data related to the charge of each subcommittee, members of the subcommittees will engage in the following questions and processes:

Teaching and Learning:

As a central component of Bexley's mission, responses pertaining to teaching and learning were common throughout each session. Frequent themes included:

- Highly qualified, experienced, long-serving, and caring faculty and staff
- A tradition of academic excellence
- Small class sizes and low teacher-to-student ratio
- Concerns around the delivery of the scripted curriculum vs providing greater teacher and student agency, a lack of options for courses, and expanding extracurricular offerings
- The importance of fostering creativity and allowing the opportunity to play
- Uneven pedagogical practices contributing to lapses in engagement
- The need to increase professional development opportunities and dedicate time to improve practice
- Identifying and prioritizing skills the current generation of students will need to be better prepared for tomorrow's challenges

In response to these themes, this subcommittee will consider strategies to implement an educational program that aligns with what all students need in the future, regardless of their abilities or learning styles. Much of the focus will be on reviewing Bexley's curriculum and pedagogy and considering ways to monitor, evaluate, and enhance teaching and learning while closely aligning these outcomes with its vision and values.

To frame the scope and help guide the subcommittee's initial process, the group may consider the following questions:

- *What are BCSD's current strengths in this area, and how might the district expand on these strengths?*
- *Is there a shared pedagogical approach across the district? If not, is there a desire for a shared approach?*
- *What vision and values frame teaching and learning in Bexley? To what extent do these promote student and teacher agency?*
- *What stories of learning are promoted, and what are the stories not being told?*
- *What professional development opportunities are available, and how are they chosen?*
- *How are new courses created, and how can the curriculum continue to evolve to meet the changing global workforce and well-being needs of Bexley's students?*

Facilities:

As Bexley looks to future growth, facilities were repeatedly mentioned and emphasized as an area in need of attention. Representative responses included:

- Teachers, librarians, classified staff and others work hard to create a warm and welcoming environment for students
- Pride in the theater facility at the Cassingham Complex
- There is an increased effort on offering healthy choices in the cafeterias
- Lack of space for future growth
- Proper facilities dedicated to staff
- Lack of adequate game and practice areas for athletes
- Lack of creative/collaborative spaces and furnishings for learning
- Cafeteria size limitations in the Cassingham facility constrain the quality of dining and social experiences for students

As facilities are a particularly urgent concern given increasing enrollments and aging infrastructure, this subcommittee will identify and begin to address the most pressing needs moving well into the future. This subcommittee will begin with an audit of Bexley's current facilities and their current use to directly support Bexley's revised mission and vision statements for 2023. The group will then make recommendations for optimizing facilities and the possible reallocation and/or expansion of facilities to meet the district's needs today and in the future. This work will include planning to improve ADA accessibility for all of Bexley's school community, ensure inclusion regardless of gender preferences, and consider furniture and other interior design options to optimize learning.

To frame the scope and help guide the subcommittee's initial process, the group may consider the following questions:

- *What are BCSD's current strengths in this area, and how might the district expand on these strengths?*
- *How do current facilities align with and support a vision of modern, innovative, collaborative learning environments?*
- *Do current facilities reflect the special and changing learning needs of students?*
- *What changes in the facilities and additions to classroom environments are needed to ensure their inclusivity in both use and function?*
- *Is there a long-term plan to address depreciation and potential capital projects?*
- *How can Bexley be more environmentally sustainable in the future?*

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:

Throughout the data collection, points about diversity, equity, and inclusion were consistently voiced. Representative responses included:

- Students, teachers, parents, and community members articulated their interest, openness, and readiness to address systemic issues that block equity and inclusion across elementary, middle, and high school cultures and curricula.
- Bexley is one of the early districts in the state and the nation to dedicate resources for a Leader of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
- When a recent DEI ELA Curriculum Audit identified issues that needed attention, a dedicated task force began working to address themes, point by point. This is ongoing work individuals across the district continuously voiced their commitment to – in ELA and beyond.
- Respondents across elementary, middle, and high school students, parents, and teachers consistently voiced support for school-level and district-wide initiatives and commitments aimed at creating a greater sense of belonging, empathy, and understanding across racial and cultural identities, LGBTQ+ students and staff, individuals with special needs and the differently abled, diverse faith perspectives, and students from families with varying levels of economic access
- The need for better acknowledgment and understanding of the meaning and practice of diversity, equity, and inclusion, teacher and staff training, more diversity in hiring, as well as the need for increased representation in leadership and opportunities for students remains.
- The need for data collection that captures the successes, challenges, and experiences of diverse students
- The importance of considering multiple, intersecting identities and needs at both the macro and micro levels, including gender, sexuality, and ability, while not diverting away from a clear commitment toward racial justice was repeatedly noted
- Addressing income disparities, inclusive language, and accessibility for all members of the school community
- A variety of obstacles with special education as well as gifted and talented programs, including insufficient training of staff, difficulty maintaining schedules, and caseloads. (Note that special education as well as services for gifted and

talented students will also be addressed in the Teaching and Learning Subcommittee.)

The subcommittee will make recommendations for building greater awareness and fostering a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture, aligned with Bexley's new mission, vision, and values, to better serve all members of Bexley's community. The subcommittee will also address questions concerning students receiving special education services as well as the gifted and talented to ensure the learning needs of every student within the district are being fully addressed.

As the district commits to addressing the academic and social-emotional learning challenges of 2023-2026 and beyond, it is important to acknowledge that the dispositions of service, courage, and cultural, global, and racial competence are embedded in a firm commitment to a DEI program that will benefit all students, from any background or identity. This strategic strand also will offer the benefit of modeling experiences of justice and belonging to help create a more psychologically safe learning culture.

To frame the scope and help guide the subcommittee's initial process, the group may consider the following questions:

- *What are BCSD's current strengths in this area, and how might the district expand on these strengths?*
- *To what extent is an emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion found or embraced throughout each school in the District? Does this seem to vary across schools or departments?*
- *How does Bexley encourage people to engage in honest, direct, and sometimes challenging conversations that may transform individuals' worldviews?*
- *Why do some consider DEI one of Bexley's strengths while others consider it an area that requires significant attention?*

- *How might the district maintain its DEI commitment, even with fluctuations in demographics, budget, and shifting pedagogical and policy trends?*
- *How are students with learning differences perceived at Bexley, and in what areas can they be better served? Is current staffing adequate to meet the needs of the learning different population?*

Culture:

Focus group respondents identified issues impacting culture within every subset of data. Common themes included:

- A welcoming and supportive environment, where a sense of belonging was frequently cited
- Strong connections to the community and city that have the potential for mutual benefits such as opportunities for internships and expanding the notion of a traditional classroom
- A desire for and a growing acceptance that schools must foster and uphold physical, mental, and emotional well-being as a priority for students, staff, and faculty
- The size of the district is seen as a systemic strength, where personalization can happen, where students and teachers are known, where community members come to each others' help, and where a wide variety of programs are offered.
- The emphasis on “achievement culture” (a term used not only by researchers but even middle and high school students at Bexley) and the narrow range of ways success is recognized
- A need to broaden and update the types of data that are collected and the stories they tell, and to more fully understand their implications on students, teachers, and the district overall
- A struggle to enjoy learning and have fun
- A desire to strengthen the fibers of the BCSD community through better communication and fostering trust

- Establishing healthy levels of parental involvement

In response to the data collected in Phase I, this subcommittee will begin by examining Bexley's notion of "excellence" from multiple perspectives within the district as well as what it means to be a successful student and engaged human being. The subcommittee will also consider holistic strategies for strengthening communication, building trust, cultivating joy, improving morale, fostering health and well-being, minimizing behavior and discipline issues, and intentionally strengthening the fibers of the Bexley community.

To frame the scope and help guide the subcommittee's initial process, the group may consider the following questions:

- *What are BCSD's current strengths in this area, and how might the district expand on these strengths?*
- *To what extent is the health and wellness of students, staff, and faculty prioritized?*
- *Are multiple paths to success for diverse learners and individuals valued?*
- *To what extent is Bexley a district with a shared mission as opposed to five separate schools?*
- *Are community-wide events conducive to strengthening relationships within the community and encouraging healthy engagement?*
- *Are there initiatives or programs to foster health, well-being, trust, and joy within the district?*

Part 4: Phases II and III: Looking Ahead to the Winter and Spring

Phase II Overview:

To reiterate, while this report captures the results of the data collection in Phase I, the listening process is not finished. Throughout Phases II and III, the process will include

and encourage continual questioning, feedback, and validation of what is being articulated. The work of Phase II will advance through the concerted efforts of the four subcommittees outlined above and a Steering Committee described below.

Formation of Subcommittees

In concert with the release of this report, volunteers from the Bexley community were encouraged to apply to serve on one of the four subcommittees through multiple streams of communications. In January, 2023, the Superintendent will form the four recommended subcommittees to address the specific areas of growth noted above. Each of these subcommittees will include representation from students, faculty, staff, parents, and the community, as well as a member of the BQI team.

Over the course of five to seven meetings in January, February, and March, these subcommittees will be charged with gathering additional data to clarify the focus of their work, determining action steps to accomplish specific goals, developing “success” benchmarks, creating a timeline for completing recommended initiatives, identifying estimated resources required to complete the work, and delegating individual responsibilities for its oversight. In addition, the chair of each subcommittee will be responsible for regularly reporting on the committee’s progress to the steering committee.

Steering Committee:

For guidance and oversight, the steering committee composed of the superintendent, each subcommittee chair, representation from the Board, and BQI team members will be formed by the beginning of January 2023. This committee will coordinate the work of each of the subcommittees, create the comprehensive timeline for the strategic planning implementation of each major initiative, identify and proactively address potential obstacles, ensure adequate time and make recommendations for the resources to be allotted for each action item, work with the communication team to write an Executive

Summary for review by the superintendent and board, and assist in planning for design and dissemination of the final Strategic Plan.

Furthermore, the steering committee will examine the current state of Bexley's culture and proactively address broad themes that have the potential to hinder the plan's implementation. This may include facilitating near-term initiatives to build stronger communication, ensuring adequate capacity to implement potential changes, creating initiatives to build greater trust, empowering individuals or groups to conduct authentic dialogue, and considering ways to manifest any immediate changes required to implement the strategic plan.

Mission, Vision, and Values

Concurrently with the Phase II work, BQI will facilitate the development and creation of new mission, vision, and value statements for Bexley City Schools as articulated by community members beginning in February. These statements, which will be drafted by representatives across the BCSD community and approved by the Board, will be informed by the data collection in Phase I and recent findings and the ongoing work by the subcommittees and the steering committee.

Phase III Overview:

Following the creation of new mission, vision, and values statements and the completion of the subcommittees' work in each of their respective areas, the steering committee will draft an Executive Summary to disseminate the strategic plan to the Bexley community by the end of the current academic year. This high-level summary, along with the new mission, vision, and values statements, will be posted on the school's website and included in other forms of communication. New mission, vision, and value statements will also be printed and posted throughout the district.

In addition, the steering committee will generate three internal documents to facilitate the successful completion of the strategic plan: an implementation plan detailing the steps for each major initiative recommended by the subcommittees, including the specific staff positions who are responsible and the criteria for success; a timeline/flowchart overlaying each section of the plan's implementation including start dates, reporting requirements, and completion dates; and the recommended allocation of both time and recommendations to the Board for resources for each initiative, including the appointment of new staff and/or relief from duties for current staff to accomplish key initiatives.

On a regular basis throughout the 2023-24 academic year, the steering committee will convene to monitor the progress of each key initiative and, if necessary, problem-solve and develop new strategies to facilitate its implementation.

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