Suffern Central School District

Educating for Personal Excellence

Suffern Central School District
Five-Year Strategic Plan
July 2021 – June 2026
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Dear Suffern Central School District Community,

We are thrilled to present you with our new Suffern Central School District Strategic Plan. This five-year strategic plan will serve as our north star. It will allow us to successfully prioritize initiatives, while also ensuring that we measure progress towards our outlined goals so that we can adjust course as necessary. Through our strategic plan, and its implementation in the years ahead, we will develop each and every student to be informed, responsible, and active citizens prepared to take the next steps in their education, careers, and lives in our diverse society.

As of this writing, it is important for us to acknowledge the current realities. The Covid-19 pandemic has presented significant challenges to our schools and our community. This period has presented us with new challenges, and forced us to adapt and work together in ways that we may not have previously believed to be possible. In spite of these challenges, the Suffern Central School District and the community have responded with resiliency. Our resiliency will enable all of us, and most importantly our students, to successfully emerge from this pandemic.

Suffern Central School District is a remarkable district. Many of our schools have received national recognition and have been designated as high performing schools by the state. However, in the spirit of continuous improvement, we know that our district has areas of growth to ensure that each and every student is prepared to take the next steps in their education, careers, and lives in our diverse society. This plan allows us to expand upon our strengths, and strategically address our areas of improvement.

Our strategic planning process began in October 2020. To ensure our plan was representative of the entire Suffern Central School District community, an 11-member steering committee was formed. The steering committee, consisting of leaders and staff from the central office, schools, the school board, and parents, crafted this strategic plan over the course of eight months. This committee analyzed both qualitative data from over 140 focus group participants (as detailed in the appendix) and quantitative data from district and state sources. The many difficult conversations during these steering committee meetings allowed us to arrive at the most critical strategic priorities for SCSD to pursue. Without their commitment, this strategic plan would not have been possible.

In closing, we wanted to thank all of the parents, families, staff, and students for their participation throughout this process. Candidly sharing your opinions with us during the development of this plan for how we could improve, along with your feedback on our draft strategic plan, were pivotal to building a robust strategic plan. Your continued commitment to SCSD will ensure that we are educating each and every one of our students for personal excellence in the years ahead.

In partnership and solidarity,

Lisa Weber, Acting Superintendent
Matthew Kern, President of the SCSD Board of Education
Community Participation

Prior to building the district’s new strategic plan, Suffern Central School District leadership requested feedback from various stakeholders (shown below) to better understand the district’s current strengths and priority areas for the next five years. Participants included staff, community partners, students, and a steering committee that ensured the new strategic plan would serve all members of our school district and community.

**Stakeholder Input:**
In December 2020, members of the school district and community (listed below and in the appendix) were invited to uncover strengths and priority areas for the new strategic plan. More than 140 participants were interviewed in 40 focus groups over two weeks; all interviews were conducted virtually to adhere to social distancing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Participants</th>
<th>District Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents of students at all schools (including non-public school children)</td>
<td>SCSD Central Office Staff</td>
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<td>Board of Education Members</td>
<td>School Principals and Administrators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chamber of Commerce Members</td>
<td>Teachers and School-Based Staff</td>
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<td>PTA Members from All Schools</td>
<td>Middle and High School Students</td>
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**Steering Committee Membership:**
To support in the development of our strategic plan, a Steering Committee of leaders with diverse backgrounds and roles were chosen. The committee members (listed below) were tasked with ensuring that our five-year strategic plan would be inclusive of the needs of the community and all the various members within Suffern Central School District.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Team Member Position</th>
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<tr>
<td>Angus MacKenzie</td>
<td>School Board Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cerafina Rodriguez</td>
<td>ENL Teacher, Sloatsburg Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine Gigante</td>
<td>PTA Council Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanetta Miles</td>
<td>RAAM President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillian Rinchiera, Ed.D.</td>
<td>Chief Information Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Castaldo, Ed.D.</td>
<td>Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Weber</td>
<td>Acting Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt Kern</td>
<td>School Board Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Marina</td>
<td>Teacher, Suffern Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Breen</td>
<td>Principal, Suffern High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Schloicka</td>
<td>Assistant Superintendent for Business</td>
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**Community Meeting:**
On May 17th, 2021, the steering committee shared an initial draft of the strategic plan virtually to allow for families, community members, and employees of the district to provide their feedback. Additional details related to the community meeting is provided in the appendix.
How the SCSD Strategic Plan Was Built

Suffern Central School District undertook a deliberate, multistage process to build the new strategic plan.

**Form Steering Committee**  
*October 2020*  
Assembled an 11-member Steering Committee to build new strategic plan (members included leaders from central office, schools, the school board, and parents).

**Conduct Stakeholder Interviews**  
*December 2020*  
Interviewed district leaders, principals, central office staff, families, students, and community partners to understand their experience in Suffern Central and what they believed should be the highest district priorities.

**Complete Needs Assessment**  
*December 2020*  
Analyzed quantitative data from district and New York state sources to evaluate Suffern Central’s current strengths and greatest potential areas for improvement.

**Draft Mission, Vision, & Theory of Action**  
*January–March 2021*  
Participated in multiple discussions to develop and refine the mission and vision statements, theory of action, strategic priority areas, and measurable goals to monitor progress towards each of the identified priority areas.

**Gather Community Feedback**  
*May 2021*  
Virtual community meetings incorporated feedback from families, students, community partners, and district staff.
SCSD At-A-Glance

Approximately 4,000 students in grades Pre-K-12 are educated in Suffern Central School District. The district employs over 400 teachers and staff across our seven schools.

Our Schools

Award Winning Schools
Several schools have been named high performing schools by the NY State Education Department.

K-12 STEAM Education
Students engage in hands-on, Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math (STEAM) learning opportunities in Kindergarten through 12th grade.

Our Classrooms

Fast Facts
Average Class Size (Grade 3-12): 17
Daily Attendance Rate: 94%
Number of Teachers Employed: 401

Student Subgroups
Economically Disadvantaged: 32%
Students with Disabilities: 15%
English as a New Language: 8%
Source: New York State Education Department

Graduation Rate: 94%
Most Common Post Graduation Plans
College/University/Vocational Programs: 97%
Entering Workforce: 2%
Enlisting in Military: 1%
SCSD Current Strengths

Families, staff, students, and the Suffern Central community are extremely proud of their schools and their successes. While conducting focus groups, feedback from a variety of sources emphasized many strengths and recent priorities, including:

- **Passionate & Committed Staff**
  
  SCSD’s staff are extremely passionate and committed to ensuring all students succeed, as they consistently go above and beyond for their students.

- **Academic Enrichment Opportunities**
  
  Students are provided with a wide array of academic programming and enrichment opportunities across all grade levels and school buildings.

- **Instructional Technology**
  
  SCSD has previously prioritized and invested more in instructional technology, ensuring that all students are 1:1 on devices.

- **Resource Allocation**
  
  SCSD has focused on using their resources to go above and beyond in responding to student and staff needs.

- **COVID-19 Learning**
  
  SCSD has responded and transitioned appropriately between learning environments during COVID-19, receiving overwhelming positive feedback from parents, staff, and students.
SCSD Mission & Vision

Suffern Central School District’s long-term aspirations are captured in our updated district mission statement and vision.

**Mission Statement:**
The mission of the District is to educate students in the critical skills and essential knowledge necessary to be informed, responsible, and active citizens prepared to take the next steps in their education, careers, and lives in our diverse society.

**Vision: Educating for Personal Excellence**

★ Students will be prepared for success in society through authentic learning opportunities designed to support individual differences while focusing on the belief that all students are capable learners.

★ All schools, staff, families, and the community will work together to educate students in a safe and secure environment and provide a high-quality educational experience for students that emphasizes achievement, social-emotional well-being, and personal responsibility.
SCSD Theory of Action

The Theory of Action for Suffern Central School District outlines our foundational beliefs about the actions that will lead to the long-term success for our students, families, staff, and community.

**IF WE...**

Commit to the following:

- **Student Success:** Supporting the academic and social emotional needs of all students in the district,

**AND**

- **Family Engagement:** Establishing meaningful relationships with families and community members,

**AND**

- **Fiscal Responsibility:** Focusing our resources to provide staff and students with the supports necessary for success now and into the future.

**THEN WE WILL...**

Develop each and every student to be informed, responsible, and active citizens prepared to take the next steps in their education, careers, and lives in our diverse society.
SCSD Strategic Priority Areas

Stemming from our Theory of Action, the Suffern Central School District has identified five priority areas to direct our collective attention and resources over the next five years. This will allow us to achieve our district mission and vision, to address any obstacles that arise, and to allow our district to utilize our energy and resources with greater alignment.

1. **Academic Success for All Students**
2. **Social–Emotional Learning and Supports**
3. **Family and Community Engagement**
4. **Staff Development and Support**
5. **Targeted Resource Use**
We will maintain a culture of high expectations and academic success grounded in authentic learning experiences so that each and every student is prepared for success in society.

SCSD believes that each and every student should receive cognitively demanding and data-driven academic curriculum and programs that will prepare them for post-secondary education, career opportunities, and lifelong success. Within this priority area, we will emphasize authentic learning opportunities that develop all of our students’ critical thinking skills and provide a culturally responsive pedagogy that challenges all of our students and addresses the needs of all of our student populations.

How we will evaluate our progress

We will primarily evaluate our progress towards Academic Success for All Students through the following:

1) Increasing the percentage of classes that have incorporated culturally responsive pedagogy.

2) Increasing the percentage of students who enroll in accelerated, honors, or AP courses.

3) Increasing the percentage of diverse learners who enroll and achieve proficiency in accelerated, honors, or AP courses.

4) Increasing the percentage of students in grades K-12 who score proficient or above on ELA and Math state and local assessments.

5) Closing achievement gaps for diverse learners in grades K-12 who score below proficient on the ELA and Math state and local assessments.
Social–Emotional Learning and Supports

We will ensure all students feel emotionally supported while also developing the resiliency and strength of character necessary for lifelong success.

SCSD understands that providing a supportive, respectful, and safe environment will ensure that all students feel emotionally supported at school and will be essential to their success inside and outside of school. Within this priority area, we will ensure that students’ social-emotional and behavioral learning is integrated into daily instruction practices to proactively address students’ needs and build connections to social-emotional learning skills into existing core academics.

How we will evaluate our progress

We will primarily evaluate our progress towards Social–Emotional Learning and Supports through the following:

1) Increasing the percentage of students who report feeling welcome at school.

2) Increasing the percentage of classrooms that have integrated Yale El RULER tools into their curriculum.

3) Increasing the percentage of students that report having at least one adult they feel they can talk to at school.

4) Increasing the percentage of students who report that their school encourages them to make positive choices.

5) Decreasing in-school and out-of-school suspensions rates.

6) Decreasing the percentage of students who are chronically absent from school.
Family and Community Engagement

We will commit to frequent, purposeful, and proactive two-way communication and engagement with families and community members.

SCSD recognizes that collaborating and partnering with families and community members is critical and will ensure that our students grow and develop in a nurturing environment. We aim to build strong relationships and create an environment where parents, families, community members, and partner organizations are actively involved with the district, as they become long-term partners in the education of all students. Within this priority area, we will proactively engage in two-way communication with parents, families, and community members so they are well-informed of student progress, upcoming events, district initiatives, and important updates.

How we will evaluate our progress
We will primarily evaluate our progress towards Family and Community Engagement through the following:

1) Increasing the percentage of parents and families who report feeling informed about what is happening in their child’s school and SCSD as a whole.

2) Increasing the percentage of parents and families who report feeling connected to their child’s school.

3) Increasing the percentage of families who believe our school leaders help families to become partners in the education of their children.

4) Increasing the percentage of families who believe our schools support their child in making positive choices.

5) Increasing the percentage of multilingual families who report that the messages provided to them by the district are clear.

6) Increasing the percentage of families who respond that teachers contact them, not only in times of concern.
Staff Development and Support

We will support, recruit, and develop staff to best support the academic and social emotional needs of all students.

SCSD knows that increasing student engagement and success starts with ensuring students are instructed and supported by highly skilled educators and staff. From delivering personalized and differentiated professional learning to staff, to strategically recruiting and hiring staff from diverse backgrounds that reflect our student demographics, we will be focusing on human capital as an essential method to enhance students’ learning and well-being. Within this priority area, we will also assess and enhance the morale amongst staff by promoting a positive culture and tailoring professional learning to their most pressing needs.

How we will evaluate our progress
We will primarily evaluate our progress towards Staff Development and Support through the following:

1) Increasing the percentage of instructional staff who indicate that their annual professional development improves instruction and student learning.

2) Increasing the percentage of instructional staff that indicate who they feel sufficiently prepared to deliver/integrate social-emotional learning.

3) Increasing the percentage of instructional staff who indicate that they feel sufficiently prepared to differentiate for their:
   a. Students with IEPs
   b. ENL students

4) Increasing the percentage of employees who indicate that their talent and work is recognized.

5) Increasing recruitment and hiring of staff from diverse backgrounds reflective of student backgrounds, including more bilingual employees and teachers of color.
**Targeted Resource Use**

*We will target the use of resources towards the district’s academic, social-emotional, and family and community engagement strategic priorities in order to balance efficiency and high-quality education.*

SCSD has historically had sufficient resources to provide students with a high-quality education. To further improve that educational experience for all of our students and strengthen relationships and partnerships between families and the community, we will be expected to make strategic programming and budgeting that focuses resources towards the district’s academic, social-emotional, and family and community engagement priority areas. Within this priority area, we will focus resources towards research-backed educational programs and promote fiscal responsibility at the school and district levels.

**How we will evaluate our progress**

We will primarily evaluate our progress towards Targeted Resource Use through the following:

1) Ensuring all initiatives and resources in the operational budget support the academic, social-emotional, and/or family and community engagement priorities.

2) Measuring the effectiveness of resource use through evaluations of new or existing staffing and programming.
How Our Progress Will be Measured

Through our strategic planning process, we have identified the strategic priority areas that will have the greatest impact on all of our students. These strategic priority areas will ensure that when we are forced to make challenging decisions about how we allocate our primary resources—people, time and money—our decisions will align to these strategic priority areas. Implementing this strategic plan starts by monitoring our progress towards our strategic priority areas. As we monitor our progress towards these priority areas, we will be communicating our results to parents, families, school staff, and community members, as this will hold us accountable to achieving our mission and vision for our district. This strategic plan will connect to and guide our annual district improvement plans, school improvement plans, and ultimately, will impact what happens within each of our school buildings on a daily basis. We resolutely believe that our strategic plan will provide the best outcomes for all of our students, families, community partners, and staff, as we continue to build upon and strengthen our excellent school district.
Glossary

★ **Achievement Gap**: the unequal or inequitable distribution of educational results and benefits among different student subgroups.

★ **Chronic Absenteeism**: as defined by the New York State Department of Education (NYSED), a student who is absent 10% or more of the days they are enrolled in school is considered chronically absent.

★ **Community**: the residents, organizations, and businesses that are connected to Suffern Central School District.

★ **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**: teaching that recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning.

★ **Diverse Learners**: includes students in subgroups that have historically struggled compared to their peers and may require or benefit from additional specific assistance and supports so that they can excel; based on NYSED data, this includes students in ENL programming, students in special education, students of color, and economically disadvantaged students.

★ **English as a New Language (ENL)**: instruction, formerly known as English as a Second Language (ESL), that emphasizes English language acquisition.

★ **Equity**: implies the necessary support and access for all students to able to maximize their potential to achieve at the highest level.

★ **Human Capital**: the skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by an individual or group, viewed in terms of their value and contribution to an organization.

★ **Mission**: a statement of our long-term district aspirations.

★ **School Improvement Plans**: annual plans developed for each school with clearly outlined initiatives and action steps that are connected to district priority areas and measurable goals.

★ **Strategic Priority Areas**: broad areas of focus that will enable the district to achieve the Theory of Action.

★ **Student Attendance**: the number of students that attended school each day the school was open divided by the number of students that were supposed to attend school each day the school was open.

★ **Student Subgroups**: groups of students with similar demographics and backgrounds or who receive similar supports. Examples include student subgroups by race, economic background, and additional supports (such as ENL or special education services).

★ **Theory of Action**: guiding statement regarding what will be required to achieve long-term success in the district.

★ **Vision**: the desired future state of the school district.

★ **Yale El RULER**: developed by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, RULER strives to infuse the foundations of emotional intelligence into schools. RULER is an acronym connected to the five skills for emotional intelligence, and it stands for recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating.
**Stakeholders Interviewed in Focus Groups:**

Stakeholders representing many different roles and backgrounds in Suffern Central were invited to share their insights on the areas of strength and primary areas of improvement they hoped to see in this strategic plan. In December 2020, over 30 hours of focus group interviews were conducted (specific roles and stakeholder groups are outlined in the graphic below).

**Focus Group Questions:**

All stakeholders that were invited to participate in focus group interviews were asked the following questions to inform how we developed our strategic plan:

1. What’s **going well** in Suffern Central School District?

2. What could **be improved** in Suffern Central School District?

3. If you could only **choose a few priorities** for the district to focus on, what would they be and why?
Community Meeting:

In accordance with public health guidance and social distancing measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 in our community, a community meeting to provide feedback for the strategic plan was held virtually on May 17th, 2021. At this meeting, a variety of parents, families, community members, school leaders and staff, and students were invited to ask questions and offer their perspectives on the drafted strategic plan. Approximately ________ (insert number of participants) attended this virtual meeting. The community meeting followed the structure detailed below:

* **Presentation of draft strategic plan:** The steering committee began the meeting by providing an overview of the strategic planning process before outlining both the draft mission, vision, theory of action, and strategic priority areas.

* **Discussion of plan and questions:** Participants were then encouraged to ask clarifying questions about the draft mission, vision, theory of action, and strategic priority areas, as well as whether they feel these areas were aligned with the district’s most pressing needs and/or whether they believed something essential to be currently missing from the plan.

* **Solicit written feedback:** At the end of the meeting, additional feedback was collected from participants to provide further input about the draft mission, vision, theory of action, and strategic priority areas.

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**Suffern Streams**

*A Monthly District Live-Stream Event on YouTube*

**5-Year District Strategic Plan Community Feedback Session**

**Monday, May 17 - 7:00 PM**

*Live on District YouTube Channel*