



Board of Education Column

By Rebecca Knutson, Fargo Board of Education President

State of the Schools Address & Public Focus Group

Fargo Public Schools' (FPS) annual State of the Schools Address and Public Focus Group was held last Thursday, January 13 at South High School. Thank you to staff and members of the public who attended.

The address served as the starting point for a more robust conversation about the District's future as it collects feedback to be used in renewing the [FPS strategic plan](#). After the address, participants had the option to break out into small groups for more detailed discussion around the information presented.

FPS Superintendent Dr. Rupak Gandhi began with an overview of the District, covering that it has 23 school buildings with enrollment just over 11,200, 88 languages are spoken throughout FPS, and the District is the fourth-largest employer in the Fargo-Moorhead area. A review of the District's budget and revenue was presented, highlighting how resources are distributed to schools.

Dr. Gandhi also shared some of the challenges facing the District. The need to secure sustainable long-term funding will continue to be a focus for all District operations and programs, including the higher expectations placed on schools to provide more services to address social issues in the community, such as mental health. Like many businesses and organizations across the country, FPS is faced with labor shortages across all areas of the District. Nationally, as well as in North Dakota, those who are involved in administering, teaching, and supporting K-12 education, are under a microscope like they have not been in a very long time. All staff have stretched and made sacrifices to provide a safe, healthy learning environment for the District's students. I continue to extend a great deal of gratitude to all the District's staff.

Please [visit this link](#) to watch the State of the Schools Address.

Dr. Gandhi's address led into a time of gathering participant feedback, with the assistance of Associate Superintendent for Secondary Schools, Dr. Robert Grosz, Associate Superintendent for Elementary Schools, Missy Eidsness, and Director of Standards Based Instruction Dr. Liann Hanson.



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Prior to the event, pre-registered attendees electronically received the *Fargo Public Schools [Annual Report 2020-21](#)* and the *[Public Focus Group Process](#)*, in preparation for providing feedback on the following questions:

- What conditions have changed in the external environment or organizational environment since the District wrote the strategic plan in 2014 that should be considered for potential updates?
- Do the mission statement and strategic goals continue to express our vision of school and the things we need to do to reach that vision?
- Have we learned anything from our implementation efforts that would require modifications in our strategic plan?
- What is missing from the current FPS strategic plan that must be included as it is renewed?

The event closed with participants breaking out into small groups to further discuss feedback on the topics raised earlier in the evening. Facilitated by school board members and administrators, this time provided an opportunity to review the responses collected in the large group and go into more detailed conversation about the needs of FPS.

Prior to the event starting, an expo of projects occurring in our schools, funded through grants from the FPS Development Foundation, was available in the commons of South High School. Additionally, representatives from the FPS Human Resources department were available to answer questions and provide more information about existing job vacancies in FPS.

Those who attended the State of the Schools Address and Public Focus Group event are now part of a far-reaching and multifaceted effort the District began in 2000, with work on the District's first strategic plan. During the 2014-15 school year, a new strategic plan was created. The current FPS strategic plan was approved by the Fargo Board of Education June 9, 2015 and was developed with an intentional process that allowed for a wide variety of stakeholder input. Although the plan is a living document that is updated annually with slight modifications, it is also imperative that it face periodic comprehensive review to ensure alignment with the District's mission of educating and empowering all students to succeed.

With the help of the District's stakeholders, the FPS strategic plan will continue to be a proactive road map to create the kind of educational experiences we want for our children. The plan will make the District's priorities clear, ensure full transparency, and use measurable outcomes to hold FPS accountable for maintaining focus on the District's mission of achieving excellence by educating and empowering all students to succeed.

