



Phase 1:

Guiding Principles

Final Report | January 2026



Introduction

The district engaged the Alachua County community to help establish priorities for the **Our Schools – Future Ready** plan and to gather thoughts, concerns, and ideas about the district’s school programs, facilities, locations, and operations. Through this effort, the district received more than 50,000 responses from an estimated 2,500 community members across the county, representing former and current students, parents, district- and school-based administrators, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, ages, and perspectives.

Throughout the engagement process, community members shared a wide range of experiences, priorities, and viewpoints. Participants demonstrated a willingness to openly and honestly share their stories, listen to differing ideas, and engage respectfully with one another. Across thousands of responses, clear and consistent themes emerged, reflecting shared values and priorities that resonated throughout the county. These shared themes form the foundation of the guiding principles and represent what the community identified as most important in shaping the district’s future.

Responses from the community will help shape the plan’s direction. The project team has identified several themes and drafted guiding principles in response to the feedback gathered during the first phase of engagement. [Results from community input can be viewed in their entirety here.](#) Upon adoption, these guiding principles will serve as foundation for research, analysis, and implementation strategies used in the drafting of the **Comprehensive School Strategy Plan (CSSP)**.

The community consistently expressed a strong desire for welcoming, well-maintained schools, meaningful, and diverse learning opportunities,

and strong support for teachers and staff. Respondents also emphasized the importance of using district resources thoughtfully so these priorities can be sustained over time. At the core of these conversations was a shared understanding that students are the primary beneficiaries of the district’s programs, services, and facilities. As a result, planning decisions should be evaluated first and foremost based on their impact on student experience, learning outcomes, and long-term success.

As the district looks ahead, this work initiates an open and transparent conversation about how transportation, facility use, enrollment patterns, program access, and financial planning can be better aligned to more effectively support the learning environments and opportunities the community values most. This includes exploring how the district can thoughtfully right-size schools over time, aligning facilities, programs, and capacity with enrollment trends, while protecting and maintaining educational quality, community identity, and responsible stewardship of public resources.

These guiding principles do not represent final decisions. Instead, they set an initial direction and help frame the questions to be explored as the planning process continues. Guiding principles are not legislative in nature, but they establish a framework for developing implementation strategies in the final plan. In addition, they will help ensure that future discussions and planning remain grounded in community priorities, shared values, and long-term stewardship of public schools.

Themes

Conversations with and responses from community members during engagement activities identified recurring topics related to the district’s current conditions and long-term needs. While individual comments often



addressed multiple issues, patterns emerged across thousands of responses. Through a detailed review and analysis of the engagement results, the following themes stood out as shared values, needs, and concerns. The project team organized these themes to more clearly and meaningfully reflect community priorities. They are not intended to capture every individual comment, but rather to reflect the broad areas of focus raised most consistently by students, families, staff, and community members. Together, they provide the foundation for the guiding principles that follow.

The themes identified during analysis are as follows:

- Academics and Learning
- Electives and Enrichment
- School-specific Programs and Magnet Opportunities
- Teachers and Staff
- School Culture and Climate
- Student Support and Care
- Community and Belonging
- Activities and Events
- Facilities and Operations
- Transportation Services
- Community Connections, Program Access, and Diverse Educational Opportunities
- Financial Management and Stewardship

These themes were further organized into three distinct topics: **(1)** Teaching and Learning, **(2)** Student Experience and Well-Being, and **(3)** Operations, Infrastructure, and Stewardship. It should be noted that while the project team analyzed, organized, and drafted each of the twelve themes, they are ultimately a product of the community. These themes and topic areas reflect the consensus of community input and conversations across all engagement sessions, derived from thousands of comments and a

thorough analysis of results across all engagement activities.

Teaching and Learning

1. Academics and Learning

Focuses on the importance of providing consistent, high-quality instruction across all grade levels, with depth in content and a broad range of offerings for students of all achievement levels and abilities.

2. Electives and Enrichment

Affirms that a major driver of enrollment decisions is the breadth of electives, magnet programs, clubs, extracurricular activities, arts, and athletics offered, and whether these opportunities cater to a wide range of interests, talents, and academic pathways.

3. School-Specific Programs and Magnet Opportunities

Recognizes that school-specific magnets and programs help individual schools attract more students, strengthen the identity of local schools, and better prepare students for future careers and higher education.

4. Teachers and Staff

Recognizes the essential role educators and staff play in the community and student success, and fully supports enhanced compensation, benefits, and professional support to better acknowledge their contributions and set educators and students up for success.

Student Experience and Well-Being

5. School Culture and Climate

Emphasizes that school's function best when students feel safe and comfortable in their learning environments, which is fostered by well-designed, secure facilities and caring, supportive faculty.



6. Student Support and Care

Expresses a desire for the introduction and expansion of programs that prepare all students for success, regardless of ability, and for increased mentorship from teachers and staff to ensure students feel supported throughout their educational experience.

7. Community and Belonging

Describes schools as integral to their communities, often serving as important gathering spaces, symbols of their neighborhoods, and a celebration of diverse groups, especially in older schools with storied histories and multiple generations of students.

8. Activities and Events

Demonstrates that district- and school-level activities and events foster community involvement and engagement opportunities that extend beyond regular education. These include athletics, music, theater, clubs, and other school-sponsored events that unite students, families, and the broader community.

Operations, Infrastructure, and Stewardship

9. Facilities and Operations

Emphasizes that educational facilities provide the foundation for effective learning and contribute to school culture, pride, and identity. Facilities must be safe, modern, well-equipped, and well-maintained to support high-quality instruction, foster positive school climates, and reflect the value placed on students, educators, and the broader school community.

10. Transportation Services

Highlights that district transportation must be reliable and efficient, and that bus drivers must be adequately supported and compensated. Transportation systems were viewed as essential to student access, daily attendance, and family confidence in the public school system.

11. Community Connections, Program Access, and Diverse Educational Opportunities

Highlights the importance of maintaining strong school-community ties and ensuring equitable access to diverse programs. Attendance and enrollment policies should support community identity, offer meaningful opportunities, including magnet and specialized programs, and allow students to access varied learning environments aligned with their interests and needs.

12. Financial Management and Stewardship

Highlights responsible financial management, transparency, and stewardship of public resources. Respondents stressed clear communication regarding fund allocation, decision-making, and investments aligned with student needs, facilities, and district goals. Sound financial planning is vital for maintaining trust, sustainability, and the long-term quality of public education.

Guiding Principles

These guiding principles reflect conversations with community members, analysis of themes from engagement results, and data-informed research on the district's existing conditions. They define the focus of efforts to draft the Comprehensive School Strategy Plan (CSSP) and are intended to serve as a shared foundation for ongoing discussion, exploration, and decision-making.

Collectively, the guiding principles address:

- Support for teachers and staff
- High-quality academics and diverse academic pathways
- Student interests, engagement, and program access
- Safe, welcoming, and supportive learning environments
- Student support and services



- Facilities, transportation, and operational systems
- Attendance boundaries and enrollment considerations
- Responsible fiscal management and stewardship
- Clear communication and ongoing community engagement
- Long-range planning for the future of the district

A. Ensure clear, consistent, and inclusive communication and engagement throughout the planning process

Strong planning depends on clear, timely, and accessible communication. Open, ongoing engagement with students, families, staff, and community members should be prioritized by sharing information clearly, explaining the purpose and status of planning efforts, and creating meaningful opportunities for dialogue.

B. Strengthen, sustain, and expand high-quality learning opportunities

Students across all grade levels are best positioned for success when they have access to consistent, high-quality instruction and a broad mix of academic pathways. The district should support strong core academics while protecting and expanding electives and enrichment opportunities, including arts, music, drama, technology, career and technical education, athletics, and magnet and specialized programs, to allow students to pursue their interests and goals.

C. Foster academic pathways that connect students to their interests and future goals

Students are more engaged and successful when academic programs reflect their interests, strengths, and aspirations. Planning efforts should support clear and diverse academic pathways—including magnet programs, specialized coursework, career and technical

education, and other program options—that allow students to explore interests, build skills, and prepare for postsecondary education, jobs, and lifelong learning. Wherever possible, these pathways should promote continuity across grade levels and provide equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities.

D. Provide for the success of teachers and staff districtwide

Successful schools start with well supported teachers and staff. Efforts should focus on competitive pay and benefits, professional support, and advancement opportunities, and working environments that equip educators and staff to help students thrive.

E. Support safe, welcoming, and supportive learning environments

Students and families emphasized that schools function best when students feel safe, supported, and respected. The district should prioritize environments and practices that strengthen positive school culture, support student well-being, and ensure access to caring adults and appropriate services to help students succeed academically and socially.

F. Ensure strong, accessible student supports and services

Students expressed a desire for expanded support that helps all learners succeed, regardless of ability or circumstance. Planning should consider how programs, staffing, and services can be strengthened to better meet student needs and enhance mentoring and guidance systems.

G. Foster community connection and belonging through schools

Schools are often a student's first source of community beyond their families. Planning efforts should support strong school-community connections and opportunities that strengthen relationships among students, families, and



neighborhoods while reinforcing pride in local schools.

H. Invest in facilities that support learning, school pride, and long-term needs

Educational facilities provide the foundation for effective learning and contribute to school culture, pride, and identity. Planning should prioritize safe, modern, well-equipped, and well-maintained facilities and consider long-term facility investments that support program quality and student experience.

I. Support reliable, efficient, and student-centered transportation

District transportation is essential to student access and daily attendance. The district should continue exploring ways to improve reliability, efficiency, staffing, and service quality so transportation supports student success and family confidence in the public school system.

J. Approach attendance boundaries and enrollment decisions with community and opportunity in mind

The community emphasized the importance of maintaining strong connections between schools and the communities they serve while ensuring equitable access to programs and diverse learning opportunities. As enrollment patterns and school utilization are evaluated, planning should consider how attendance boundary approaches can support community identity, provide meaningful program access, and reduce unintended impacts on students and families.

K. Practice responsible, transparent fiscal management and stewardship

Community members emphasized the importance of responsible financial planning and transparency. Planning efforts should clearly communicate how resources are prioritized and aligned with district goals across facilities, programs, staffing, and transportation to support long-term sustainability and public trust.

L. Protect the future of our public school system through thoughtful long-range planning

All planning efforts should focus on long-term opportunities and concerns affecting public schools, including facilities, programs, staffing, transportation, enrollment trends, and fiscal sustainability. The final plan should provide practical implementation strategies that deliver high-quality education and strong learning environments for years to come.

Next Steps

These guiding principles are the result of a detailed analysis of comments, responses, and conversations gathered during the first phase of community engagement. Each of the twelve guiding principles will serve as a foundation for the student attendance boundaries and implementation strategies that will be drafted as part of the **Comprehensive School Strategy Plan**, helping to align community input with existing School Board policy. This final report on the guiding principles, along with the Board Workshop presenting the results of community engagement on Monday, January 12, 2025, concludes Phase 1 of the **Our Schools – Future Ready** project.

During Phase 2, which is now beginning, a second round of community engagement will focus on updated student attendance boundaries, program and facility improvements, and school-specific feedback. Draft student attendance boundaries are expected to be showcased at the School Board Workshop on Monday, February 2, 2025. The second round of community engagement will also begin on February 2, at 5:30 pm, at Mebane Middle School. A complete schedule of dates and times for the Phase 2 engagement sessions can be found on the [Alachua County School District](https://www.alachua.k12.fl.us/) website.