



# **Long-Range Strategic Plan**

*2023 – 2028 Action Steps*

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Vision and Mission.....	4
Safe and Supportive Schools.....	5
Academics.....	6
Communication/Engagement.....	8
Finance/Operation Effectiveness.....	10
Partnerships.....	12

## Introduction

The Reading School District has made significant strides in the last several years to bring our brand to life: One Vision. All Students. One Reading. We are financially stable, have improved academics, finance, and operations, have increased partnerships, and enhanced communications between our students, their parents/guardians, our staff, and the community. This has been no small feat but a commitment to our vision even during a pandemic has ensured this success.

Over the last year, a series of listening circles were held to solicit feedback from students, staff, parents, and community leaders. Over 70 listening sessions took place, attended by the Reading School District (RSD) leadership team, between Spring 2022 and Fall 2022. During these meetings, participants were presented with a one-page information sheet (Appendix A) that captured the former strategic plan and its accomplishments. Participants in each session answered the following:

- What does the Reading School District do well?
- What are areas of improvement for the Reading School District?

This feedback was important for our next strategic plan. We also considered the political and economic environments, the technological divide, and sociocultural factors that often influence decisions so we can be more strategic in where and how we spend our time and other resources.

From the listening sessions, the RSD Leadership team recognized the following: we are good at checking off boxes. The missing link from our feedback efforts was an overall lack of a “sense of belonging or connectedness” between us which impacts academic success and concerns around safety. Research has shown us repeatedly that student academic success is tied to feeling connected to their school. That connection sparks the motivation to achieve, leading to mastery, independence, and confidence and creates the opportunity to support others in their journey of belonging. Our feedback has also shed light on the need adults have to feel connected to each other, which impacts their ability to connect well with students. It is the circle of life.

Our previous strategic plan revolved around seeing academics and safety as separate entities versus fully interconnected. Safety is both physical and psychological, and while our Safe Schools goal of 2015-2020 was that all students and staff report a welcoming, respectful, and safe learning environment where everyone feels honored and connected, our strategic actions spoke more to physical safety than psychological safety. The missing piece was creating a school culture that is integrated into every facet of our work and every interaction with each other. Why is this important to the Reading School District? Because we understand that every school and every organization has both a culture and a climate.

Culture is our beliefs, values, behaviors, attitudes, rituals, and norms that tell everyone who we are and why we do what we do. It’s how we show up. Climate on the other hand is subjective. It is the perceptions, feelings, and assumptions we make based on what we see and hear.

The bottom line is that both culture and climate are essential. Both culture and climate influence performance. The impact of culture is, however, more substantial, and more direct. When the ideal culture does not drive climate, a culture of disconnect occurs and performance suffers as a result. This has a ripple effect on both adults and students. A positive culture drives performance, engagement, and discretionary effort. When culture is seen as a foundational strategy, then it is more than a professed set of beliefs, values, and behaviors. It is the intersection of passion, purpose, and planning. Through careful and deliberate execution and integration, it brings those beliefs and values to life through actions and behaviors. A focus on defining and implementing a culture beyond a tagline enables us to honestly say One Vision, All Students, One Reading and mean it.

Below are a few of the statements the RSD Leadership team including building principals and assistant principals discussed during a planning session:

We believe...

- ... All students (and staff) should feel safe and supported.
- ... All students can achieve if we create the right conditions.
- ... Everyone deserves the opportunity to reach their potential.
- ... It takes a village and partnerships to make us stronger.
- ... We have the power to significantly change our community for the better.
- ... Parents are doing the best they can with what they have.
- ... Our thinking impacts our actions and our outcomes.

As a result of our beliefs, our 2023-2028 Strategic Plan will focus on the following:

Culture: The integration and intentionality of a safe, supportive, restorative, growth-oriented, and trauma-informed care culture will be the foundation of who we are and what we stand for. Our behaviors and actions provide the safety and space for all to learn and connect and have a sense of hope for their future. We choose our words and align our actions to express care while creating a practice of accountability. We instill a positive sense of self for each student because positive identity is the single most important factor in determining anyone's future. We want everyone - staff, students, and parents - to be seen and feel valued.

Focusing on a "Red Knight" culture means creating alignment of the intent and tone of our five Ps: policies, procedures, processes, place (environment), and people. Alignment is top to bottom, side to side and minimizes the perception (and sometimes reality) of mixed messages, helps recruit and retain staff, develops a leadership pipeline, and builds trust and hope for the future.

This mindset is integrated through our five focus areas: Academics, Safe and Supportive Schools, Finance and Operations, Partnerships, and Communications.

Specific action steps aimed at creating our "One Vision" approach must start with administration and staff.

### Culture Action Steps:

- We develop a clear set of behaviors and actions that inspire, challenge, and support our purpose.
- We integrate and ritualize those behaviors for sustainable change.
- We work together to identify gaps in understanding and learning and provide the training or coaching needed so all staff can bring their best forward.
- We design a system of support for staff and students through various means (small group and cooperative learning strategies, online learning tools, restorative circles, etc.) to maximize best practices and feelings of connectedness.
- We set -and explain- high standards for expected behaviors and use a coach approach to help everyone behave in a manner that speaks to our vision and creates unified accountability.
- We model expected behaviors (values and common courtesies) because transformation begins with me.
- We create a no excuse/only solutions mindset.
- We design discipline policies and procedures that teach to sustain changed behavior.
- We create a welcoming experience for everyone regardless of the initial behavior exhibited (customer service experience).
- We value our staff and provide opportunities for them to share best practices and engage in continuous learning.
- We showcase student and staff efforts, achievements, and talents beyond sports.
- We highlight administrators (A day in the life of...) for students and parents to see what it's like to walk in their shoes.
- We regularly review policies, processes and procedures for transparency, consistency, and integrity.
- We share the good with parents, not just the concerns.

This invitation to connect will be the foundation for a ripple effect that impacts our students, their families, and the community. We hold the power to determine the environment that will allow each of us to show up for one another despite what surrounds us.

## Mission of Reading School District

**The Reading School District ignites the infinite potential of its students and transforms that potential into reality.**

## Vision of Reading School District

The Reading School District empowers all students to recognize and realize their fullest potential. The collective efforts of all adults in the Reading School District are focused on this very ambitious goal through:

- establishing a culture of belonging that values the inherent cultural and linguistic assets of our students and families, ensuring that they feel safe, respected, supported, and heard;
- exemplifying a culture of high expectations for all students, regardless of their labels or perceived barriers, as well as all staff;
- challenging students with rigorous, relevant, and thought-provoking learning experiences through innovative pedagogical practices, both in and outside the classroom;
- monitoring, evaluating, and continuously improving systemic practices, infrastructure, and the use of human capital; and
- leveraging the unwavering support of our community partners and lawmakers at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure that our schools have the human and material resources to equip our students with the academic and interpersonal skills needed to achieve their dreams.

Our students graduate from Reading Senior High School understanding that their education will also improve their quality of life and dramatically improve the Reading community.

Whether they go to college, trade school, the military, or straight into the workforce, our graduates go on to become community leaders, healthcare providers, educators, farmers, law enforcement officers, scientists, machine operators, business owners, engineers, builders, retail workers, and social media influencers. In fact, many will work in jobs that don't even exist yet.

We all play a role in achieving this vision...

## **Safe and Supportive Schools**

### ***Current State***

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the Reading School District has seen an increase in our students' and staff's mental health needs. The number of Student Assistance Program (SAP) and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) referrals have increased by 20%. Surveys at the secondary level further indicate that 62% of the parents feel the school does not meet the students' socio-emotional needs. Due to the increased needs of our students, we must provide more supports to our students, staff, and families as well as consistency in our current systems. Consistency includes operating both within and across levels, so students have seamless transitions. Survey results indicate that educators feel there is a lack of collaborative efforts to improve the school and district. Specifically, in the survey results, trust, partnerships with parents, and overall respect were low, particularly at the secondary levels. This indicates a need to create an environment where all stakeholders are valued and respected.

### ***Safe Schools Goal***

All students and staff report a welcoming, respectful, safe, and supportive learning environment where everyone feels honored and connected.

- Develop a comprehensive plan to promote a safe and supportive environment by addressing physical, social, and emotional needs which impact academic learning and engagement.
- Develop a safe, positive, and supportive school climate by implementing consistent systems in every school that build relationships, promote positive relationships, and provide differentiated academic and behavioral support through MTSS, SAP, Restorative Practices, and Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS).
- Create an environment where all stakeholders are valued and respected.

### ***Action Steps for the School Year 2023-2024:***

1. Assess current programs and practices aimed to improve culture and climate. Data collection will be compared with research on best practices for large urban school districts.
2. Assess current physical safety measures by consulting a third party.
3. Create a training plan with an implementation timeline that meets the needs of all staff to provide a safe, supportive environment for all.
4. Increase staffing for counselors and social workers in all buildings to address the mental health needs of students.
5. Define the ideal supportive learning environment for every student at every level.
6. Create a safety perception survey and explore other tools with metrics to measure staff and students' perceptions of safety. Create an implementation timeline of the tool to measure the plan's effectiveness in Safety and Supportive Schools over the next five years.

### ***Action Steps for Later Years:***

1. Align safe and supportive school policies, programs, and practices within the district to maximize trust and equity.
2. Identify and increase mental health support for all staff and students.
3. Develop systems and procedures that create consistent transitions for students when moving to different learning settings in the Reading School District.
4. Build a model of inclusive and supportive learning environments at each level (elementary and secondary).
5. Implement a data collection and analysis system to ensure district-wide supports are effective and successful.
6. Develop consistent failure prevention plans across levels, maintain rigor, and scaffolded supports for all scholars.
7. Develop clear and explicit expectations for staff interactions with students and families and with each other.
8. Deliver ongoing training for all students to ensure high-quality interactions among students, staff, families, and partners to ensure a welcoming environment.
9. Provide support on trauma-informed care to staff to assist with well-being rigor.
10. Build a culture of leadership for students and staff by providing multiple opportunities for individuals to assume leadership roles

## **Academics**

### ***Current State***

Since our return to in-person instruction, the need to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for all has been a critical first step in the Reading School District's journey toward recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Significant investments have been made to address student mental health services, offer social-emotional learning programs, upgrade facilities and HVAC systems, improve transportation services, recruit and retain staffing, offer vaccine clinics, and provide other important services that impact academics. We have also received substantial funding to address learning loss due to the year and a half of virtual instruction. All indicators suggest that, as an educational organization, the Reading School District has a long road ahead toward academic recovery.

The Reading School District's current data indicates that the pandemic had a significant negative impact on the academic performance of our students. Scores on state assessments are alarmingly low across the board. In the 21-22 school year, only 21.38% of students in third through twelfth grades reached proficiency in English Language Arts, 26.54% of students reached proficiency in Science, and only 6.9% of students reached proficiency in Mathematics. The data also indicates that the pandemic had a devastating impact on the academic performance of our students with disabilities and English language learners with single-digit proficiency rates in most subject areas.

In addition to low test scores, the pandemic's impact has surfaced in other ways. At the high school level, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of students who failed core subjects during virtual instruction and are now in need of credit recovery to get back on track for graduation. Many



students, at both the high school and middle school levels, appear to be disengaged with school as indicated by an increase in negative behaviors such as cutting class, refusal to comply with school rules, fighting in the halls, truancy, or simply neglecting their assignments. At the elementary level, students are entering school with less preparation and teachers report having to spend more time teaching students how to "do school" including how to interact appropriately with their peers. These trends among students have impacted teacher retention with resignations pouring in at alarming rates, especially at the secondary level.

While the District recognizes that these issues appear overwhelming, they are not insurmountable. Academic recovery can be achieved through careful planning and creative utilization of resources to not only provide students with a safe and supportive environment but also to engage them in a culture of high expectations focused on providing all students with rigorous learning opportunities.

### ***Academic Goal***

To implement a common, district-wide curriculum based on high standards and evidence-based pedagogy that significantly increases academic achievement across all student populations at every grade level while adequately preparing students for college and career opportunities.

- Engage all schools in cycles of continuous improvement to regularly assess student needs through data analysis, set meaningful goals and develop action steps focused on holding all stakeholders accountable for academic achievement.
- Improve and implement the K-12 standards-aligned curriculum.
- Improve instructional delivery through the implementation of a consistent instructional framework districtwide.
- Develop and implement academic and extra-curricular programs that address students' academic needs and increase levels of student engagement at all levels.

### ***Action Steps for the School Year 2023-2024:***

1. Implement the newly-adopted, evidence-based math program and support teachers through professional development and coaching.
2. Maintain implementation of the evidence-based English language arts program and support teachers through professional development and coaching.
3. Train administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals in the high-leverage practices outlined in the RSD Instructional Framework.
4. Develop a walk-through process to be utilized by both administrators and teachers to monitor the implementation of the instructional framework to determine areas for growth and support that will be addressed through professional development.
5. Create frequent opportunities for teachers to engage in common planning and professional development to focus on delivering quality instruction.
6. Conduct quarterly data summits in building and biannual data summits, district-wide.
7. Adjust middle school schedules to focus on social-emotional well-being to promote increased engagement and strong relationships between staff and students.

***Action Steps for Later Years:***

1. Ensure all students have access to a standards-driven, rigorous curriculum.
2. Identify and remove barriers to engaged and sustained learning.
3. Develop more opportunities for career exploration at the middle school level so students clearly understand opportunities for careers in high school.
4. Create a standard of practice for both building and grade level data summits where all staff are using data to make informed decisions.
5. Restructure grading and assessment practices to align with current research.
6. Continue to expand opportunities for students to engage in college and career readiness activities such as college visits, internships, work-study, dual enrollment, etc.
7. Focus on middle school students and the development of their emotional and social well-being.
8. Add leadership and service opportunities for students at all levels and engage older students with younger students to be mentors and models across the district.
9. Prepare for the implementation of the new PA Science Standards through the curriculum review cycle and professional development.
10. Refine high school career pathways, virtual academy, and credit recovery programming.
11. Provide professional development to develop the capacity of school district leaders in planning for effective cycles of school improvement, monitoring of instruction, and supporting teachers in the domains of Danielson's Framework for Effective Teaching.

**Communication/Engagement*****Current State***

Since the last strategic plan, the Reading School District's Communications Department has made monumental improvements. It has won numerous state and national awards and has become nationally recognized with several projects developed.

Through the strategic plan, listening sessions families and staff stated they are pleased with the increased level of communications from the district and the various channels of communication being utilized. Families and staff shared concerns related to the timeliness of messages. Additionally, staff voiced the need to be aware of the information before it being shared with students, families, and the community.

In addition, telling our own story of Reading School District's great accomplishments will always be at the forefront.

***Communications/Engagement Goal***

Design and implement a comprehensive communication plan that aims to earn the understanding, support, and trust of all school district stakeholders by delivering effective and timely communication and information to all District stakeholders. We tell our story of success.

- Achieve coordinated and proactive communication, both internally and externally, regarding school safety, emergencies, and crises resulting in timelier communication to families and staff.
- Implement a proactive Reading School District recognition program for both staff and students.
- Increase engagement with families and Reading community by utilizing proactive strategic media communication programs, use of varied media platforms to elevate the Reading School District's image, brand, and reputation.

### ***Action Steps for the School Year 2023-2024:***

1. Develop recognition programs and appreciation events for staff to continue to build positive relationships and feelings of connectedness with the Reading School District.
2. Review, update, and practice the Crisis Communication Plan.
3. Conduct up-to-date training for building staff in mass notifications, other communication platforms, and social media to ensure competence and consistency in utilization.
4. Continue to utilize all social media channels to generate positive feedback, applause, and student recognition.
5. Maintain monthly e-newsletter, including staff shout-outs, board meeting updates, and staff spotlight articles.
6. Increase families' understanding and use of student academic platforms and Home Access Center.
7. Implement Let's Talk - K12, a website insight platform, for parents to get immediate feedback and response from a district representative.

### ***Action Steps for Later Years:***

1. Create campaigns with video and graphics to educate parents on Standard Response Protocol and SafetoSayPA.com; run throughout the school year.
2. Develop a program to recognize students for their accomplishments in academics, athletics, arts, and trades.
3. Utilize LinkedIn to generate applause and staff recognition at a higher level.
4. Increase the Reading School District's presence on the local radio shows and other media outlets.
5. Create a community-wide paper newsletter (English & Spanish) to be distributed during the academic year.
6. Continue training staff on building a culture of respect and welcoming environments not only for families but for their co-workers as well.
7. Develop metrics and tools to measure the effectiveness of communication, engagement actions, and parent satisfaction.

## **Finance/Operational Effectiveness**

### ***Current State***

Over the past several years, the Reading School District has been understaffed in both unfilled positions and meeting the target staffing ratios to allow for a sustainable and meaningful impact on students and the learning environment. During the past five years, we have maintained between 100-150 open positions based on the current positions in the annual budget. In addition to the open positions, we do not currently maintain an active staff that meets various staffing models, and staffing models for various departments need to be developed to ensure we are meeting the needs of our students, staff, and the educational and operational programs. We are not currently maintaining desired retention rates for both instructional and support positions and need to develop programs and environments that entice our staff to remain within our district. The Reading School District's 10-year average turnover rate through January 2023 is 10.75% and amongst our teachers it is 9.21%. While our REA members have an average of 11 years of service, 37% have less than five years, and more than 50% of those who resigned from the district between school years 2018 and 2023 did so with less than 5 years experience.

Unfortunately, the inability to retain current staff and fill open positions has painted a negative picture for both the community and our existing employees. Having the appropriate staffing will allow for the following:

- more teachers to provide students with a quality education to prepare them for life after graduation;
- more educational assistants to aid students in the learning process by providing additional supports;
- more counselors and social workers to provide social and emotional supports for students;
- more safe schools officers to maintain orderly schools and safe learning environments;
- more custodians to allow for cleaner and safer learning environments; and
- more maintenance staff to allow for equipment to be maintained and establish the necessary deferred maintenance programs.

Available and adequate funding plays an intricate part in the success and improvement of the Reading School District. We have successfully advocated for additional funding to enhance programming and improve operations. Still, we need to develop an efficient budget aligned with the district's school improvement goals.

### ***Finance/Operational Effectiveness Goal***

To produce a balanced budget with accurate and timely reporting to our varied agencies that meets the needs of our students by funding and supporting a quality education while ensuring the District's long-term sustainability.

- Meet the needs of our students by providing and retaining the appropriate staffing for quality education across all areas.
- Ensure all buildings and facilities are up to date and properly operating to ensure the highest quality environment for teaching and learning.
- Ensure the highest standards of transportation so that students are provided safe transport to and from school and have a positive impact on school performance while remaining fiscally responsible.
- Establish procedures that maintain a system of data collection and assessment to support program development, improve departmental efficiency and effectiveness, and make informed decisions for all operational departments.

### ***Action Steps for the School Year 2023-2024:***

1. Develop a plan to implement proper staffing levels/ratios over the next five years subject to budgetary limitations.
2. Identify and institute onboarding practices that prepare new hires for success.
3. Establish and properly maintain the position control system to improve recruitment, retention, and reporting.
4. Develop a robust recruitment and retention plan based on turnover and fill rate data to ensure a targeted approach.
5. Improve methods to support new staff to allow for improved retention rates.
6. Establish and maintain facilities studies to be reviewed annually to update improvement priorities to meet the educational goals of students and staff.
7. Conduct annual walkthroughs of buildings with building and district leadership to ensure input from all stakeholders is included in the facilities studies.
8. Establish funding for capital improvement projects, including buildings and technology enhancements.
9. Review the work order system and work order completion and turnover analysis by building, trades, and district-wide to establish improvement efficiencies.
10. Review the current process of budget allocations to departments and buildings to ensure the allocations are aligned with school improvement plans.
11. Evaluate bell schedules of all building levels to improve efficiencies within transportation.
12. Meet with all departments to determine which data types would be beneficial in the decision-making process and establish a dashboard to track progress.

### ***Action steps for Later Years:***

1. Continually monitor turnover ratio and fill rate data by department, building and district-wide.
2. Create a plan on how departments can collaborate across the district to improve student success and improve perceptions.
3. Establish expanded professional development programs to include all staff and not only teaching and learning personnel.
4. Evaluate the budget process to account for shared responsibilities (i.e. athletics and physical education allocations).

5. Review trends and metrics to develop multi-year funding plans (real estate tax revenue projections and modeling, potential revenue streams from building rentals, etc.)
6. Establish and maintain five-year plans for all departments.
7. Establish and maintain five-, 10-, and 20-year capital improvement plans.
8. Develop a preventative maintenance program to reduce operating and repair costs and to increase the useful life of existing equipment and prevent major replacement projects.

## Partnerships

### *Partnerships Current State*

The Reading School District has improved its standing in the community. As a result, new and well-established community partners alike have expressed their desire to support the district's educational programming and grow opportunities for District students inside and outside of the classroom. Parents have also expressed a sincere interest in becoming more involved in their children's education. All District employees, regardless of their position, are invested in our students' success and want to efficiently leverage their time and expertise to support student achievement. The district remains committed to capitalizing on this goodwill and supporting a robust network of partnerships.

### *Partnerships Goal*

To identify, align, empower, and support all interested parties to drive academic success for all students.

- Clearly communicate the district's needs and expectations for all partners to ensure transparency and trust.
- Evaluate partnerships regularly to ensure effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes and highlight and promote successful partnerships (Knight-ships).
- Develop and support sustainable quadrant-based PTOs/PTAs/School Advisory Committee K-8 and a single RHS-based PTO/PTA/SAC that includes representation from RKAAs and RM-CTC (Parent-ships).
- Connect non-academic central office and other non-student facing employees with school buildings and/or student groups (Ambassador-ships).

### *Action Steps for the School Year 2023-2024:*

1. Engage in a needs analysis to identify key areas where partners could best be utilized, e.g., tutoring, internship hosts, and after-school activities.
2. Develop a Request for Partnership framework that can be shared with the community to advertise a District-identified need, the District's expectations of a partner fulfilling that need, and other relevant information that potential partners could use to determine whether there is a "fit" or "match" between its abilities and the District's needs
3. Facilitate regular meetings with/among identified partners to ensure that goals are aligned to the success of RSD students and to avoid overlap and duplication of efforts.
4. Promote United Way's 211 initiative as a community resource for families and direct existing partners to United Way to increase synergies.

***Action Steps for Later Years:***

1. Increase awareness among RSD staff, students, and families of services already provided by the District and current partners through regularly occurring resource fairs at key times, e.g., back-to-school and transitions to new buildings; and grow participation and attendance at fairs year-over-year.
2. Develop and maintain a resource map for families to show where services can be found throughout the city.
3. Build support systems among partners to allow new/grassroots organizations to network and collaborate with more well-established organizations on District-identified issues.
4. Identify and empower key District personnel to act as community liaisons so all organizations have an identified point of contact.
5. Develop parent academy curriculums around specific topics and District tools, such as reading, Home Access Center, and college admissions.
6. Empower parents within school communities to advocate for themselves and their students while working in a recognized framework through more robust parent academies.