

# Milwaukee Public Schools Operational Review

*Findings and recommendations for improving Central Office operations in service of academic excellence for all Milwaukee Public Schools students.*

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February 2025

# Project Overview

## Diagnostic Review and Fact Finding

*October - November*

Form the foundation for further engagement, investigation, and analysis for the project.

## Refine Recommendations and Broaden Engagement

*Late November - Early January*

Develop and deliver a set of preliminary key recommendations.

## Finalize and Prepare for Implementation

*January*

Prepare and deliver a final report of improvement recommendations and a companion operational recommendation roadmap.

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Conducted 18 stakeholder interviews to capture diverse perspectives on operational challenges and successes. Participants include MPS District leadership, DPI leadership, and MPS Board members.
- **Diagnostic Review:** Analyzed organizational documents and reports to gain a detailed understanding of the district's operational landscape, including current and past stakeholder feedback.
- **Benchmarking Research:** Identified best practices by reviewing operational documents from comparable districts, including: Indianapolis, Baltimore, Cleveland, Chicago, and Philadelphia.
- **Data Analysis:** Reviewed data insights from the district, including raw data and results from previous analyses such as staff and vacancy data and survey results.

# The Current Landscape

Both internal and external factors influence the current state of MPS Central Office operations.

## Internal Factors

- High superintendent and cabinet turnover
- Difficult board dynamics and a strained relationship between Board and Administration
- Internal culture of fear and reluctance to change
- Central Office staff skill gaps
- Lack of public trust compounded by financial reporting challenges

## External Factors

- Declining enrollment
- Unique school-choice dynamics with robust charter school options and a highly-utilized voucher system
- Teacher/talent shortage
- High-needs student population
- Aging and outdated facilities

# Internal Factors

A central office that is not positioned to support schools in ensuring student success.



Absence of a clear vision with synchronized execution.



Leadership routinely disempowered to lead.



**Board** role understanding and relationship to Administration

Political (not student) motivation and **tenuous media relationships**

**Lack of transparent communication** and public trust

**Internal culture of fear** and reluctance to change

Root Causes:

# The Opportunity

New Insights
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>MGT Operational Review</b></li><li>• Upcoming External Instructional Review</li><li>• 2024 Financial Audit</li><li>• HYA Superintendent Search Survey</li></ul>

New Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New Superintendent</li><li>• New Central Office Hires</li><li>• New Board Members</li></ul>

**New Strategic Direction**

**Strategic Planning**

The District has the opportunity to reprioritize a small set of initiatives with clear, measurable outcomes to be refined by the incoming Superintendent.

**Implementation Support**

By investing in implementation support in high-impact areas of the organization, the District can maximize the efficacy of its existing investments and expand personnel capacity.

# 3 Goals to Catalyze Student Success

*Our findings are organized into **3 overarching goals**, supported by 29 discrete recommendations. Together, these are in pursuit of **increased success for all of MPS' students**.*

## Success for All MPS Students



### Create a Coherent Central System

- Restructure Central Office
- Invest in the Office of Human Resources
- Make Targeted Shifts to the Strategic Plan



### Foster Meaningful Communication & Collaboration

- Improve Board & District Collaboration
- Bolster Leadership and Operations within the Department of Communications and Marketing
- Enhance Data Management and Utilization



### Operate and Fund Strategically

- Maintain External Accountability Structures
- Invest in Technology Infrastructure and Planning
- Redesign Key Internal Procedures

# Overview of Goal 1: Create a Coherent Central System

## Success for All MPS Students

*The following objectives will enhance organizational effectiveness and foster greater alignment across departments by aligning structures, strategies, and resources to ensure the District's central system effectively supports student success.*



### Create a Coherent Central System

**Restructuring Central Office** will clarify roles and responsibilities in support of streamlined decision-making and operational efficiency.

**Investing in Human Resources** to recruit and retain effective staff and better develop existing staff will lead to better service for students and repaired public trust.

**Making targeted shifts to the Strategic Plan** to align on fewer, simpler goals focused on student success will enable better execution and communication about progress to the public, Board, and media.

# Goal 1: Create a Coherent Central System

## Objective 1: Restructure Central Office

- 01 Clarify roles of independent offices** by developing guiding documents to articulate the roles, responsibilities, and collaboration structures of OAE, Office of Board Governance, MPS Board, and MPS Administration.
- 02 Evaluate departmental structures** ensuring logical reporting lines vertically by function.
- 03 Hire a Chief Communications Officer and Chief Operations Officer** with change management experience.
- 04 Create a cross-functional role or team** to be deployed on special projects. This role or team should leverage expertise across departments and ensure coherent execution.



# Goal 1: Create a Coherent Central System

## Objective 2: Invest in the Office of Human Resources

01

**Conduct an external search to install new Human Resources leadership** with the capability and willingness to shepherd comprehensive changes on an ambitious timeline.

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02

**Expand departmental capacity** by redesigning employee reporting processes, identifying high-leverage initiatives, and narrowing job scopes to transform culture and maximize employee contributions.

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03

**Acquire external surge support** to address immediate challenges and provide the flexibility needed to sustain progress during high-demand periods. The external support provider should oversee high-priority strategic efforts beyond the Office's near-term capacity such as revamping the recruitment model and maximizing the technological systems.

# Goal 1: Create a Coherent Central System

## Objective 3: Make Targeted Shifts to the Strategic Plan

Recommendations

01

**Evolve MPS' Strategic Plan** by creating one cohesive document encapsulating cross-functional goals centered around student success. The new plan should replace MPS' Five Priorities and current strategic initiatives and serve as the guiding vision for the District.

02

**Explicitly link goals to student outcomes** by drawing from peer-district examples. MPS should also consider increasing partnerships with The Council of Great City Schools or similar entities that convene cross-district leaders to provide benchmarking opportunities and collegial support from additional comparable districts.

03

**Create a District-wide implementation plan** to facilitate cross-departmental collaboration and track progress toward strategic priorities. In addition, develop systems and structures to ensure high-quality, efficient implementation.

04

**Conduct a "Superintendent Listening Tour"** designed to help the newly installed superintendent better understand the District from the perspective of educators, scholars, families, and the community.

# Overview of Goal 2: Foster Meaningful Communication and Collaboration

## Success for All MPS Students



*The following objectives will strengthen the impact and effectiveness of internal and external MPS Communication, thereby rebuilding relationships with the media, improving transparency internally and externally, and restoring trust with the public.*

### Foster Meaningful Communication & Collaboration

**Improving Board and District collaboration** will align communication to the public centered around student success.

**Bolstering leadership and operations within the Department of Communications and Marketing** will enhance public relations, improve transparency, and provide the foundation to navigate future communications challenges effectively.

**Enhancing data management and utilization** will ensure accurate, informed decision-making and transparent communication.

# Goal 2: Foster Meaningful Communication & Collaboration

## Objective 1: Improve Collaboration Between MPS Board of Directors and District Leadership

**01** **Consolidate Board and MPS District communication offices** and align on priorities to ensure cohesive messaging across the District.

**02** **Provide board governance training** to help Board members better understand their roles and develop actionable and realistic expectations of MPS Administration. This will foster greater public transparency and facilitate meaningful action.

# Goal 2: Foster Meaningful Communication & Collaboration

## Objective 2: Bolster Leadership and Operations Within the Department of Communications and Marketing

Recommendations

**01** **Develop a comprehensive communications plan** to ensure clarity, accessibility, and alignment with strategic priorities. This plan should encompass all communication channels, including overhauling the District’s website. Expedite the timeline for updating and implementing the communications plan, ensuring it is completed by the end of 2025 instead of the current 2028 target.

**02** **Institutionalize knowledge management** to ensure consistency and support more effective communication across departments. Introduce formalized knowledge management expectations and processes as part of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

**03** **Leverage current facilities planning** to identify communication gaps and opportunities for enhanced collaboration and messaging.

# Goal 2: Foster Meaningful Communication & Collaboration

## Objective 3: Enhance Data Management and Utilization

- 01** **Codify protocols** to ensure consistency and enable data-driven decision-making. Establish clear and standardized data protocols and review processes to be utilized across cabinet-level and department-level meetings.
- 02** **Create unified datasets** to establish single sources of truth with complete information that can be used to evaluate the current landscape and plan for the future.
- 03** **Revamp public-facing dashboard** to fully align with the Strategic Plan, ensuring it is visually appealing, user-friendly, and accessible to all stakeholders, thereby enhancing transparency and building community trust.
- 04** **Invest in upskilling the Department of Research, Assessment, and Data** through targeted training to augment capacity and expertise. Data fellowship programs could offer the opportunity for external skill development.

# Overview of Goal 3: Operate and Fund Strategically

## Success for All MPS Students



*The following objectives will support MPS in planning for the future and ensure the District is equipped for financial sustainability, operational efficiency, and long-term success.*

### Operate and Fund Strategically

**Maintaining external accountability structures** will support newly installed leaders in the Office of Finance and ensure timely corrective action.

**Investing in technological infrastructure and planning** will allow the district to operate efficiently, move towards greater cross-department alignment, better protect student data and plan for the future.

**Redesigning key internal procedures** will ensure the onboarding process is efficient and thorough and clearly covers expectations, roles, and responsibilities through a precise articulation of MPS' internal culture of focus on student success.

# Goal 3: Operate and Fund Strategically

## Objective 1: Maintain External Accountability Structures

01

**Continue fully engaging with all DPI support offered** through regular meetings and structured planning processes, similar to the CAP. Beyond the CAP, continued meetings may support ensuring newly established finance and operational strategic goals and subsequent benchmarks are met. Meetings should remain frequent in the near term (occurring at least monthly), though they could transition to be less frequent as continued progress toward shared goals and benchmarks is observed.

02

**Empower cross-functional leaders** to identify additional areas of opportunity for increased DPI support and broader budgetary planning and partnership. Examples could include grant application opportunities for increased funding, professional development, or technological system communication improvements between DPI and MPS.



# Goal 3: Operate and Fund Strategically

## Objective 2: Invest in Technological Infrastructure and Planning

- 01** **Develop a five-year technology improvement roadmap** focusing on a streamlined and efficient future state that aligns with organizational goals and priorities.
- 02** **Invest in technology infrastructure** to allow synergy between DPI and MPS financial reporting software.
- 03** **Provide external change management support** to ensure swift implementation of new systems organization-wide.
- 04** **Standardize computing programs** to ensure departments are operating on a single cloud computing program rather than utilizing both Google and Microsoft.

# Goal 3: Operate and Fund Strategically

## Objective 3: Redesign Key Internal Procedures

01

**Redesign the onboarding process** to ensure all new hires (both internal and external) have a comprehensive orientation to departmental procedures, role-specific duties, and broader cultural norms and practices. Onboarding should also highlight any opportunities for professional development and best practices for raising concerns or filing complaints in a solutions-oriented manner for all employees.

02

**Swiftly and thoroughly integrate the newly-hired Grants Accounting Manager and hire a new Comptroller**, ensuring the CFO has capacity to onboard both positions efficiently while carrying out her current duties. Equipping both positions for success is important for ensuring cohesion and operational capacity are maximized within the Office and beyond.

03

**Overhaul reporting and grievance policies** to promote a workplace culture of collaboration and learning while disincentivizing retaliation.

# Looking Ahead

*Our recommendations address root causes by improving structures, communications, and operations to cooperatively support schools and ensure students are equipped for success.*



<b>Additional Insights</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● External Academic Audit</li><li>● 2024 Financial Audit</li><li>● HYA Superintendent Search Survey</li></ul>



<b>Leadership Changes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● New Superintendent</li><li>● New Chief Departmental Officers</li><li>● New Board Members</li></ul>



*Through partnership with the Board and broader Milwaukee community, MPS has a prime opportunity to enact meaningful change.*