

APS STRATEGIC PLANNING ENGAGEMENT

**COME TOGETHER AS ONE
DISTRICT WITH ONE
GOAL FOR EVERY CHILD.**



Review the feedback and themes we heard throughout the district during this year's Strategic Planning Process.



ENGAGEMENT BY THE NUMBERS

Over 1,250

Unique Registrations to
Engagement Sessions

More than 75

Schools and Programs Visited

3

APS All-Staff Office Hours with
at least 200 employees in each one
Questions & Answers

4

APS Student Office Hours
*High School & Middle School
Students*

25

Community Listening Sessions
*Two in Every Cluster, plus
virtual and Spanish-speaking
Families*

More than 300

Meetings with Individual Stakeholders,
Groups, and Organizations

Nearly 5,000

Let's Talk Dialogues

More than 500

Classrooms Visited

5,003

Employee Survey
Responses on Purpose

461

100-Day Plan Survey
Responses

180

Values & Vision Survey
Responses

**Dozens of Meetings with Advisories,
Committees, and Task Forces:**

Principal Advisory, Teacher Advisory,
Student Advisory, Cluster Advisory Teams,
Assessment Task Force, Athletics Task
Force, Safety & Security Task Force



OUR STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

PHASE	DELIVERABLES	DESCRIPTION
Assess & Understand	Process, Timeline, and Engagement Plan	Provides a roadmap for how we will develop a strategic plan, with transparency around timelines and ways to engage
	Needs Assessment	Describes the current state of APS by outlining data, successes & challenges, needs & expectations, uniqueness of the district
Strategic Direction	Mission & Vision	Develop a shared agreement on our vision (future state) and mission (purpose)
	Core Values & Profile of a Graduate	Agree on our fundamental behaviors and expectations for staff and students
	Overarching Goals	Develop long-range, measurable goals with targets
Strategy Development & Refinement	Theory of Action & Key Drivers/Priorities	Outline key paths and drivers to achieve our goals
	High-level Strategies & Initiatives	Identify and build out the high impact activities and the support processes needed to achieve them
	FY26 Budget Request	Identify funding for the strategies and initiatives
	Implement Annual Facilities Review	Identify any changes to school zones
Implementation & Monitoring	Change Management Plan	Develop a plan to ensure all stakeholders understand their role in achieving our strategy
	Detailed Initiative Action Plans	Complete detailed action plans outlining owners, budgets, timelines, and action steps
	Monitoring & Reporting Plan	Outline the monitoring and reporting cadence for the strategic plan

ENGAGEMENT PHASES

Phase 1 Needs Assessment: Superintendent Listening Sessions | Fall 2024

Phase 2 Strategic Direction: Values & Goals | February 13th - March 6th

Phase 3 Strategy Development: Focus & Priorities | March 7th-March 25th

Phase 4 Strategy Refinement: Strategies & Initiatives | April 3rd - April 22nd

A large crowd of graduates in caps and gowns, with many holding up their diplomas. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

PHASE 1

Needs Assessment

Fall 2024

ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement Themes (Overall)

Student Mental Health and Well-being

Discussions about SEL programs, mental health screening and resources for student well-being.

Teacher and Staff Support

Need for improved professional development, better pay, and reduced workload.

Equity in Access to Programs

Uneven access to advanced programs, gifted education, and special education services.

Parent and Community Engagement

Concerns about communication systems, virtual meeting options, and integration of digital tools like Infinite Campus.

Safety and Security

Focus on enhanced safety measures, weapon detection, emergency preparedness, and drug prevention.

“

Our literacy strategy needs to extend to middle and high school students struggling with basic reading.

“

Special education students often don't receive the resources they need, and parents are left advocating without clear communication from schools.

“

Instead of punishing students for acting out, we need to understand the underlying issues and provide support, not just consequences.

Community Engagement Themes (By Community)

Carver

- Lack of Resources & Equity in Schools
- Concerns about Teacher & Staff Support
- Communication & Accessibility Challenges

Douglass

- Safety & Emotional Support
- Equity in Educational Quality
- Family & Community Engagement

Jackson

- Overcrowding & Facility Challenges
- Equity in Access to Programs & Resources

Mays

- Employee Compensation & support
- Special Education & Inclusive Practices
- Curriculum Consistency & Alignment

Midtown

- Assessment Feedback & Alignment
- Special Education & Gifted Support
- Safety & Mental Health
- School Capacity

North Atlanta

- Resource Allocation & Budget Concerns
- Challenges within APS
- Equity in Education & Program Accessibility

South Atlanta

- Focused Equity in Student Achievement
- Community Engagement & Support

Therrell

- Parent & Community Engagement
- Resource Allocation & Equity

Washington

- Community & Student Support Needs
- Vocational & Arts Programming
- Attendance & Discipline

Spanish Families

- Safety & Security
- Parent & Community Engagement

“

Nothing compares to the experience of a high school student stepping onto a college campus to take classes.

“

Our principal and teachers genuinely care about the students, and that makes a big difference in the culture of our school.

“

My new freshman tells me that the new cafeteria menu is great! Lots of options and food is really good so far...

ENGAGEMENT

Staff Engagement Themes

Prioritize equity resource allocation

Equity in compensation and stipends

Investment aligned to outcomes

Foster transparent community and feedback platforms

Improve teacher training

Targeted support for exceptional students

Enhance literacy and numeracy initiatives

Address attendance issues

Increase mental health resources

Discuss enrollment challenges and school mergers

Understand organizational structure and vision

Career growth and leadership development

Seek feedback and advice prior to decision-making

Expand career & vocational opportunities

“
Burnout is a real issue. Teachers and staff need access to wellness programs and better work-life balance.

Student Engagement Themes

Mental health support

Consistent grading practices

Access to resources and opportunities

Exceptional Education support

Internships & mentorship

Communication to students

Lesson and assessment alignment

Connecting academics to real-life

Address bullying

Lunch process and time

“
Let students have a seat at the table when policies are being made. We know what works and what doesn't in our schools.



The background of the slide is a photograph of a large group of graduates in black caps and gowns, celebrating their achievement. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The graduates are smiling and some are waving. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

PHASE 2

Strategic Direction: Values & Goals

February 13th - March 6th

APS Board-led Community Engagement

INTENTION

The Board-led community engagement was focused on refining APS' vision and values. The community listening sessions along with the online survey provided meaningful input. As the board's role is to adopt goals and guardrails that are grounded in the community's vision and values, they used the data to develop its goals (vision), and Guardrails (values).

BOARD-LED LISTENING PROCESS

In-Person Sessions

- The board hosted four community engagement sessions where they presented current student outcome data and asked the community to provide feedback in order to help it develop a more comprehensive understanding of the community's shared vision for improved student outcomes and values that should be protected along the way.
- The community engagement sessions were held during the months of February and March of 2025 at APS high school campuses across the district, and two virtual meetings. These sessions were attended by roughly 275 members of the Atlanta community.
- The board received over 180 responses through an online survey developed in collaboration with board members.
- 1,365 individual data points were discussed by 455 members of the APS community during this engagement cycle.

Date	Vision Themes	Values Themes
February 13, 2025 North Atlanta HS 15 participants	Literacy Math Postsecondary Readiness	Discipline Equity Resource Equity Student Centered Decision Making
February 24, 2025 Cluster Advisory Team 100 participants	Literacy Math Postsecondary Readiness	High Quality Instruction Culturally Responsive Curriculum Safety and Belonging
February 25, 2025 Virtual 75 participants	Literacy Math Postsecondary Readiness	Student Centered Decision Making High Quality Instruction Accountability
February 27, 2025 Hollis IA 50 participants	Literacy Social Emotional Skills Postsecondary Readiness	Supports for Underperforming Campuses Community Engagement Accountability
March 6, 2025 South Atlanta HS 35 participants	Literacy Math Postsecondary Readiness	Supports for Underperforming Campuses Discipline Equity Data Driven Decision Making
February 13 - March 6 Online Survey 180 Participants	Literacy Math Postsecondary Readiness	SEL Supports High-impact interventions Belonging and Safety

WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID

The goal of this summary is to translate input from the board's recent community listening meetings that were focused on vision and values, along with the online survey that was used to collect additional data into a brief overview that summarizes the feedback you've received. If the board's intention is to adopt goals and guardrails that are grounded in the community's vision and values, then it should use this data to develop its goals (vision), and Guardrails (values). Information from this summary should be considered in conjunction with a similar summary of student performance data that highlights the highest leverage and highest need focus areas for the board's goals and guardrails.

VISION- "What are your priorities for what students should know or be able to do during their time in Atlanta Public Schools?"

93.89% of respondents want students to be proficient in literacy so they can read to learn throughout their educational careers and become adults with strong communication skills.

88.33% of respondents want students to be proficient in numeracy so they can become adults with strong critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

85.56% of respondents want students to have life skills and postsecondary preparation that will help them be successful in their next phase in life whether that be in college, career, military, or as thriving community members.

Examples of comments from the board hosted cluster meetings include:

- Literacy involves more than just being able to read. Students should be able to read, write, think critically, and communicate effectively if they will be successful in the workplace.
- Consider the full scope of knowledge and skills related to mathematics: problem solving, critical thinking, and numerical reasoning.
- SEL skills that include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision making

VALUES- "What should Atlanta Public Schools stop doing or avoid doing as we pursue our student outcome goals?"

51.11% of respondents believe that children should receive additional social and emotional supports outside of the classroom so that learning can happen in the classroom.

48.33% of respondents believe that students in underperforming campuses should have access to high-impact interventions and high-quality instruction and resources.

43.89% of respondents value psychological safety and belonging for students and staff.

41.67% of respondents believe academic and financial resources should be allocated based on need.

Some examples of things that people from the community said related to these values include:

- Stop thinking the methods of the past are going to equip students for the future.
- Stop assigning uncertified teachers to low performing campuses.
- Stop gatekeeping effective instructional and effective behavior management strategies.
- Stop normalizing underperformance and failure (or said differently) stop withholding evidence based core instructional strategies.
- Don't overemphasize graduation rates or other vanity metrics.
- Don't suspend students for minor infractions.
- Don't engage the community in a way that is reactive (instead of proactive).

What should students know or be able to do by the time they leave APS?

Community members shared their hopes for what students should achieve by graduation:

- Academic Readiness: Students should graduate with strong reading and math skills, as these are essential for long-term success.
- Critical Thinking: Students need the ability to analyze information, think independently, and make thoughtful decisions.
- Life & Soft Skills: Essential skills like communication, conflict resolution, and punctuality are key to personal and professional success.
- Balanced College & Career Prep: APS should prepare students for both college and career pathways so every student leaves with a plan for their future.

“Kids have to be able to critically think... they don't always know how to process all the information to make a decision.”

“Not every kid is going to college, but they all need to have a career path.”



What should APS stop or avoid doing to better support student outcomes?

The community highlighted practices they feel APS should change to better serve students:

- Harsh Discipline Policies: Parents expressed concern that suspensions, especially for minor infractions, push students out of the classroom and disrupt learning.
- Lack of Collaboration: Schools should work together more to share strategies, resources, and best practices across the district.
- Overemphasis on College: While college is important, APS should equally value career readiness for students who choose different paths.
- Ignoring Inequities: Community members raised concerns about racial disparities in discipline and special education referrals, urging APS to address systemic biases.
- Politics Over Students: The focus should always be on student success, not political agendas or external pressures.

“Stop pursuing politics over student outcomes...pupils over politics.”

“Stop suspending students for things like insubordination.”



Employee Engagement Survey

From January 21 to February 8, 2025, all full-time Atlanta Public Schools staff had the opportunity to take the Employee Engagement Survey. As part of that survey, 5,003 staff members shared their feedback to this question:

In three words or short phrases, please describe Atlanta Public Schools' purpose (i.e., why Atlanta Public Schools exists as an organization).

Key Themes:

College and Career Readiness

- Preparing students to be college and career ready upon graduation was the most frequently cited purpose
- Focus on developing skills needed for post-secondary success
- Emphasis on providing pathways to higher education and workforce preparation

Equity and Student Support

- Creating a caring culture of equity, trust and collaboration
- Providing equal educational opportunities for all students
- Supporting the whole child through academic, social and emotional development

Community Impact

- Serving and empowering local communities
- Building partnerships between schools, families and community
- Developing productive citizens who contribute positively to society

Academic Excellence

- Delivering high-quality education
- Fostering lifelong learning
- Promoting student achievement and growth

The responses consistently emphasized APS's core mission of preparing students for future success through equitable, high-quality education while engaging families and communities. Most respondents viewed the organization's purpose as going beyond just academics to include developing well-rounded individuals ready for college, career and life.



TOPIC	RESPONDENTS
> Atlanta, Public, School, Child, Educate, Purpose, Student, Exist, Education, City	2,006
> Prepare, Ready, Growth, Ensure, Create, Grow, Long, Community, Leader, Achievement	801
> Student, Child, Scholar, Kid, Trust, Youth, Inclusion, Inspire, People, Leadership	487
Educate, Education, Teach, Ensure, Service, Academic, Tomorrow's, Equitable, Help, Culture	237
Life, Future, Success, Achievement, World, Citizen, Nurture, Successful, Atlanta, Center	171
Work, Place, Great, Good, Environment, Nice, Learn, Safe	71
Ready, Life, Readiness, Inspire, Community, Leader, Grow, Child, Empower, Preparation	19
College, Long, Success, Future, Succeed, Learner, Care, High, Cultivate, Support	15
Career, Long, Learner, Future, Succeed, World, Real, Productive, Care, High	7

A background image of a large group of graduates in caps and gowns, smiling and celebrating. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

PHASE 3

Strategy Development: Focus & Priorities

March 7th-March 25th

Strategy Development: Focus & Priorities

ACTIVITY

Atlanta Public Schools hosted a series of Strategic Planning sessions with students, families, and community members to explore what must be true for schools, operations, and family and community partnerships to achieve the district's goals of Academic Excellence & Critical Thinking and Life Skills & College and Career Readiness. Stakeholders emphasized the need for inclusive instruction, early career exposure, and strong social-emotional support.

Schools

What must be true of schools to ensure we are meeting our goals?

Family & Community Partnership

What must be true of family and community partnership to ensure we are meeting our goals?

APS Operational & Resource Support

What must be true of our operational and resource support to ensure we are meeting our goals?



Board Goals

Defines Our Success

Examples:

- Academic Excellence & Critical Thinking
- Life Skills & Career Readiness

Teaching & Learning

Defines Our Core Focus

Examples:

- Highly-effective Teachers & Leaders
- High-quality instructional materials with timely support (professional learning, curriculum, assessments)
- Targeted resources for learners with the most opportunities for growth (subgroups)

SCHOOLS

Academic Excellence & Critical Thinking

- **High-Quality Teaching:** Invest in recruiting, developing, and retaining certified, competent educators. Teachers should receive ongoing professional learning and support.
- **Rigorous & Relevant Curriculum:** Curriculum must be modern, aligned to standards, and reflect students' cultures and lived experiences. Families want stronger emphasis on reading, math, writing, and computer science.
- **Whole-Child Learning:** Social-emotional learning (SEL) should be integrated into the classroom. Schools should be welcoming, inclusive, and safe, both physically and emotionally.
- **Equity & Inclusion:** Provide equitable learning environments where all students, including multilingual learners and students with disabilities, feel supported and capable.
- **Instructional Practices:** Use evidence-based teaching strategies, project-based learning, and student-centered approaches like differentiated instruction and productive struggle.
- **Assessment & Accountability:** Shift focus from test scores to the learning process. Hold all schools (APS, charter, partner) accountable with transparency in student outcomes and policies.

Life Skills & Career Readiness

- **Early & Continuous Career Exposure:** Stakeholders advocate for real-world learning (e.g., JROTC, vocational training, job shadowing, apprenticeships) starting in early grades.
- **Financial Literacy & Practical Skills:** Life readiness should include soft skills, resume writing, managing money, signing documents, and "Life 101" courses.
- **Pathways for All Students:** Emphasis on providing multiple post-secondary options—college, career, military—based on student interest and aptitude, supported by assessments and CTAE certifications.
- **Support for Diverse Needs:** More individual teacher attention, SEL support, and equitable access to career-prep programs across schools and student backgrounds.



OPERATIONS

Academic Excellence & Critical Thinking

- **Facilities & Infrastructure:** Clean, safe, inclusive school buildings, ADA compliance, and modern classrooms that support teaching and learning (including green and sensory spaces).
- **Data-Informed Systems:** Use data and accountability tools to evaluate program success and ensure district responsiveness.
- **Technology & Tools:** Equitable access to devices and instructional platforms; improved training for both families and educators on key systems.
- **Staffing & Scheduling:** Address inconsistencies in hiring, certification, and scheduling across clusters to ensure academic equity.

Life Skills & Career Readiness

- **Transportation Equity:** Ensure reliable and timely transport for internships, after-school programs, and daily attendance—MARTA passes and bus route input mentioned.
- **Mental Health & Wellness:** School-based clinics, mental health staff, "Zen rooms," and wraparound services are essential to readiness.
- **Life Enrichment Spaces:** Innovation labs, makerspaces, and modernized electives foster career-linked skills.
- **Policy Review:** Need for clear, fair, and consistently applied attendance and discipline policies—avoiding criminalization of student behavior.
- **Nutrition & Housing:** Provide healthy meals and explore housing support for teachers as readiness barriers.

FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS


Academic Excellence & Critical Thinking

- **Accessible Communication:** Multilingual, transparent communication is vital—via websites, text platforms, in-person outreach, and asynchronous resources.
- **Aligned Expectations:** Educators and families need shared understanding of academic expectations and curriculum goals. Adult Learning & Support: GED programs, parenting classes, and home-learning resources (e.g., make-and-take kits) are valued.
- **Tutoring & Mentoring:** Families want access to out-of-school academic support and peer mentoring among students.
- **Cultural Respect & Appreciation:** Families seek school environments that reinforce respect for cultural values and family roles.

Life Skills & Career Readiness

- **Parent University & Workshops:** Strong demand for family education in topics like scholarships, job prep, financial literacy, and college navigation.
- **Community-Based Career Exposure:** Field trips, local apprenticeships, and career days should connect students with nearby businesses and professionals.
- **District-Wide Frameworks:** Families support establishing consistent engagement and resource frameworks to avoid initiative fatigue.
- **Support for Marginalized Families:** Special consideration for parents with disabilities or limited English proficiency; ensure all families can navigate school systems.
- **Shared Responsibility:** Families want to be co-creators in student readiness, with structured roles via GO Teams and shared decision-making.



The background of the slide is a photograph of a large group of graduates in black caps and gowns, celebrating at a commencement ceremony. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The graduates are smiling and some are waving. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

PHASE 4

Strategy Refinement: Strategies & Initiatives

April 3rd - April 22nd

Strategy Refinement: Strategies & Initiatives

ACTIVITY

Atlanta Public Schools hosted a series of Strategic Planning sessions with students, families, and community members to prioritize the previously identified areas and provide initial feedback on vision and mission language



"Empowering Atlanta students to shape the future" (Vision Statement)

Themes of Support:

- Generally well-received and described as “clear,” “aspirational,” and aligned with district goals.
- Participants appreciated the emphasis on **Atlanta** as a defining identity and the intention to center students as agents of change.
- Supporters highlighted that it “sets a tone” and recognizes students as capable of shaping their own futures.

Key Critiques and Suggestions:

- The **word “future”** was seen as too vague. Community members emphasized the need to clarify whether this refers to **career, college, civic life, or broader societal impact**.
- Suggested to personalize it more: **“shape their future”** to place ownership more clearly on students.
- Concern was raised about the **lack of explicit reference to equity, creativity, or human-centered growth**, with some calling it too “industrial” or “generic”.

"Educate with excellence, creating growth, building grit, and preparing graduates" (Mission Statement)

Themes of Support:

- “Educate with excellence” was broadly supported, with participants stating it reflects ambition and commitment to quality.
- “Creating growth” was seen positively when it was connected to **academic, personal, and social-emotional development**.
- “Preparing graduates” was considered necessary and measurable, but stakeholders wanted it tied more directly to **readiness for life, not just diplomas**.

Key Concerns (especially about “grit”):

The term **“grit”** sparked extensive debate across every meeting. Concerns included:

- It can **ignore systemic inequities** and suggest that students’ lack of success is due to personal failings.
- It may unintentionally **promote a harmful hustle culture**, especially in marginalized communities.
- It may place **disproportionate burden on students** without holding systems accountable.

Suggestions included replacing or redefining “grit” to emphasize **community resilience, collective support**, or to use alternate terms like “tenacity,” “perseverance,” or “resilience” — and define them clearly.

Top Priorities for Schools, District, and Family/Community

Top Priorities for Schools

Recurring priorities across all sessions:

- **High-Quality Teaching & Instructional Practices:** Seen as the most critical lever for change, often paired with ongoing professional development.
- **Assessment and Accountability:** Focused not just on testing, but transparent and timely feedback loops that support improvement.
- **Whole Child Learning / Equity & Inclusion:** Called foundational; includes mental wellness, SEL, belonging, and safety.
- **Pathways for All Students:** Emphasized career exposure, dual enrollment, non-college tracks.

Notes

- There is **clear alignment** across meetings on the importance of narrowing focus and creating clarity in strategic priorities.
- **Words matter:** stakeholders are invested in not just catchy phrases, but **deep definitions and alignment** to real outcomes.
- The “**Atlanta identity**” is both a point of pride and a responsibility: participants expect APS to serve as a leader and model within the city.



Top Priorities for APS District/System

Recurring priorities across all sessions:

- **Facilities and Infrastructure:** Safe, well-maintained, and technologically equipped schools are essential.
- **Mental Health and Wellness:** Prioritized consistently, with calls for embedded supports and trauma-informed practices.
- **Data-Informed Systems:** Importance of using both quantitative and qualitative data for real-time decision-making and program evaluation.
- **Transportation Equity:** Suggested in relation to after-school programming access and equity for marginalized students.



Top Priorities for APS District/System

Recurring priorities across all sessions:

- **Accessible Communication:** Unanimous agreement on the need for streamlined, multilingual, two-way platforms.
- **Tutoring and Mentoring:** Strong desire for academic and social-emotional support outside of traditional class time.
- **Shared Responsibility:** Emphasizing the role of parents, teachers, and community leaders in student success.
- **Support for Marginalized Families:** Includes housing insecurity, special education needs, cultural competence, and systemic access issues.
- **Community-Based Career Exposure:** Real-world learning via partnerships with businesses and local industries, especially for middle and high school students.

These points reflect themes that emerged consistently across multiple meetings. Notably, families also emphasized concerns about special education, the need to align and streamline school policies, and the importance of keeping students engaged, enrolled, and supported with basics like food and housing to help them succeed.

The background of the slide is a photograph of a large group of graduates in caps and gowns, celebrating their graduation. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The graduates are smiling and holding up their diplomas.

Lessons Learned *Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement with AI: Building Simple, Faster Feedback Systems*

Jennifer Owens, Atlanta Public Schools

Leveraging AI to Engage Stakeholders

As part of her Strategic Data Project work, Data Strategist Jennifer Owens leveraged our stakeholder engagement process to try new ways of engaging with Artificial Intelligence (AI). Below is an overview and lessons learned of her work.

Research Questions:

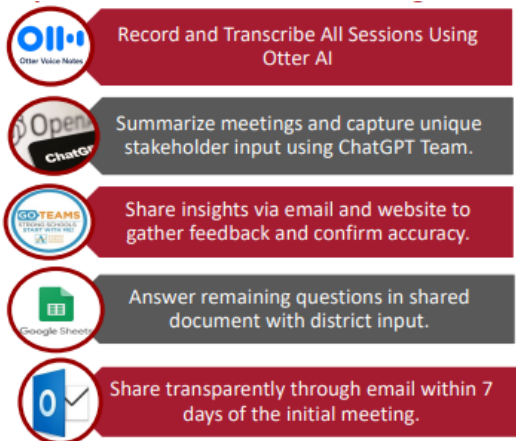
- How can qualitative data be shared in a short time frame with key stakeholders to inform decision-making?
- How can we close the feedback loop, cultivate trust and demonstrate that stakeholder input is valued?
- How can we engage with stakeholders equitably to ensure feedback is representative of our diverse communities?

Problem Statement

Atlanta Public Schools (APS) has prioritized stakeholder engagement, collecting input through various advisory council and community meetings. However, current efforts often result in siloed feedback and limited transparency. Participation is typically higher among non-Title I schools, making it difficult to capture perspectives that reflect the district’s full diversity. Without a cohesive system to organize and share qualitative data, it’s unclear how input informs decisions—causing stakeholders to question the impact of their engagement. This project aims to address these challenges and answer the three guiding research questions.

What’s an efficient process that can achieve these goals?

The new superintendent held listening sessions during his first 100 days to gather input from students, employees and community members on their priorities

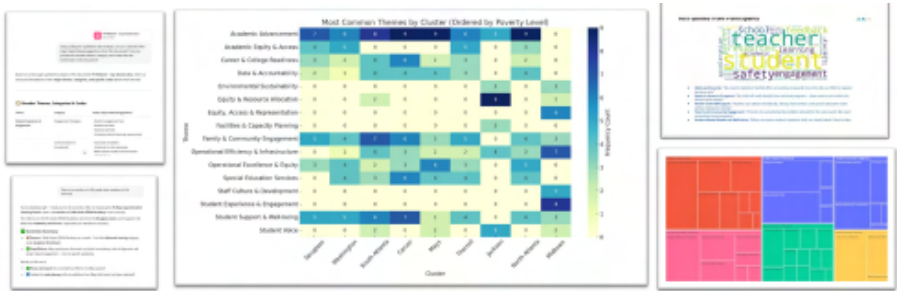


How can AI support data analysis in this process?

A qualitative analysis of stakeholder session transcripts was conducted using **ChatGPT Team** and **Data Analyst GPT**. ChatGPT was used to generate initial codes, organize them into categories and themes, and develop a code glossary. The outputs were then exported to a spreadsheet for further analysis, which included:

- **Thematic and categorical analysis**, including code frequency, quote-to-code linkage, and theme clustering
- **Cluster comparison and equity analysis**, examining how themes varied across school clusters based on poverty level and size
- **Discourse analysis**, identifying tone, power dynamics, and expressions of frustration, hope, or agency in stakeholder voices
- **Cross-group analysis**, exploring commonalities and differences among stakeholder perspectives

This approach streamlined the coding process and enhanced the depth and clarity of findings.



What did the analysis reveal?

Academic concerns are a top priority across all clusters, while equity takes shape in locally distinct ways—focusing on access to pathways and supports in Douglass, Washington, and Carver, and on gifted programs, multilingual inclusion, and signature program funding in Jackson, Midtown, and North Atlanta. Across all groups, stakeholders voice concerns about **safety, mental health, and equitable access**. Parents and educators seek **clearer communication and sustainable initiatives**, while students emphasize relevant learning, daily experiences, and **having a voice in decisions**.

How do we ensure the feedback loop is improved?

The analysis was shared through a Zoom session, included in the 100-day plan report, and posted online. Of those who attended the Zoom session, 60% felt the analysis was accurate. Only one topic was identified as missing; all others had been discussed but did not emerge as top themes.

“*The speed of AI allows us to confirm what we heard, close the feedback loop, and make decisions that we wouldn't have been able to do otherwise.*

Travis Norvell, APS



Lessons Learned

AI as a Support Tool – AI enhances efficiency but requires human verification. It can generate inaccurate information ("hallucinations") and must be cross-checked for accuracy.

Strengths & Limitations – AI excels at identifying broad themes across large datasets but struggles with pinpointing location-specific insights. Breaking data into spreadsheets or smaller segments improves accuracy and usability.

Expanding Engagement – More effort is needed to capture underrepresented voices. Student input often comes from highly engaged advisory committees, but broader outreach—such as gathering feedback at high-traffic community events—can improve inclusivity.

Next Steps

Refine & Continue – Integrate these improvements into the next phase of Strategic Planning for more inclusive stakeholder engagement.

Build Capacity – Train the Strategy & Engagement team and others to sustain and scale the process.

Expand Outreach – Identify underrepresented families by analyzing participation data, then proactively reach out through direct contact, community events, and partnerships with schools and local organizations to ensure their voices are heard.

“*When solutions are genuinely designed in collaboration with affected communities, it is possible to shift power, change systems, and advance equity.*

Urban Institute, Center on Education Data and Policy



