

Southern Oregon ESD

Year Zero: Strategic Planning and Organizational Foundations 2025–26

July 1, 2025 marked the beginning of a transition year for Southern Oregon Education Service District. This “Year Zero” focused on listening, strengthening internal systems, and building the organizational foundation necessary to support the implementation of a new five-year strategic plan.

The work of this year centered on four key areas: **culture and communication, leadership and governance, facilities, and systems improvement.**

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

A people-first approach guided early efforts to strengthen culture, visibility, and communication across the organization and with our partners.

Key actions included:

Strengthening Organizational Identity

- Refreshed SOESD website to highlight the landscapes and communities of Southern Oregon while improving user experience.
- Introduced inclusive letterhead listing regional office locations and board members.
- Implemented consistent building signage to improve wayfinding and present a cohesive agency identity.

Recognizing and Connecting with Employees

- Initiated birthday recognition cards mailed to the homes of employees and retirees.
- Introduced *Coffee with Cabinet* as a monthly opportunity for informal conversation and connection.
- Launched a virtual question box to encourage open communication and feedback.

Improving Internal and External Communication

- Created a Communications and Partnerships Coordinator position.
- Launched new social media platforms to increase visibility and engagement.
- Introduced two regular publications:
 - *Blueprint & Beyond* weekly newsletter for employees and board members
 - *Blueprint & Beyond: District Edition* monthly newsletter for component districts
- Established district liaisons, assigning coordinators to districts to strengthen relationships, improve customer service, and ensure consistent communication.

These efforts were designed to support a **human-centered, people-first culture** and strengthen relationships across the region.

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

During Year Zero, SOESD also strengthened leadership structures to improve collaboration, efficiency, and service delivery.

Key changes included:

Administrative Team Restructure

- Created an Assistant Superintendent role overseeing ten coordinators across two divisions to increase alignment, integration, and collaboration.
- Reorganized technology services and custodial/maintenance supports.
- Conducted code reviews to update salary placement for several positions.

Staffing

- Filled multiple positions that had been long vacant, strengthening program capacity and operational stability.

Leadership Development

- Established a new SOESD Leadership Team to strengthen communication and coordination across departments.
- Cabinet trained and implemented "Rounding" process to improve two-way communication, support, and regular recognition of staff.

These adjustments were designed to ensure the organization has the leadership structure necessary to implement strategic priorities effectively.

BOARD GOVERNANCE AND SUPPORT

With six new board members joining SOESD this year, significant effort was dedicated to strengthening governance practices and board support systems.

Major accomplishments included:

- Onboarding six of nine board members
- Hosting the first SOESD board retreat
- Developing:
 - Board Operating Agreement
 - Board/Superintendent Operating Agreement
 - Superintendent Goals

Additional governance improvements included:

- Adoption of a new **superintendent evaluation tool** incorporating a Targeted Feedback Survey.
- Completion of a **full policy rewrite with OSBA.**

- Implementation of **BoardBook** to improve board meeting management and access to materials.

These efforts created stronger alignment between governance, leadership, and organizational priorities.

FACILITIES MODERNIZATION

Year Zero also included significant progress toward modernizing SOESD facilities and consolidating operations.

Ramsey Ave Early Childhood Services Campus (Admin Building and Allen Creek Preschool)

- Project went to bid and contract awarded.
- Groundbreaking: September 18, 2025
- Staff moved into the building during Winter Break 2025.
- Ribbon cutting planned following completion of the playground installation.

Phoenix District Office

- Ribbon Cutting: April 14, 2026, 4-6p
- Office relocation beginning April 15, continuing through May and June.

Facility Consolidation

Closed locations (by June 30, 2026):

- Chevy Way (winter break 2025)
- West Main
- Franquette
- Earhart
- Lars Way Warehouse (timeline TBD)

Repurposed locations:

- Gilbert Creek (discussion underway for Summer 2026)
- Grape Street: Operations Center (completion expected by June 30, 2026)

SOESD also applied for a grant to support a **comprehensive facility audit and long-term capital improvement planning process**.

These changes will improve efficiency, collaboration, and service delivery across the agency.

SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Significant work was also undertaken to strengthen operational systems and prepare for long-term strategic alignment.

Key initiatives included:

Technology and Systems Improvements

- Converted financial systems to the **iVisions Cloud platform**, improving reliability and accessibility.

Strategic Planning

- Launched an inclusive strategic planning process on September 30, 2025.
- Conducted multiple rounds of stakeholder engagement including:
 - Focus groups (October 2025 and January 2026)
 - Focus group survey
 - Validation survey
 - Administrative team retreat and survey

This process resulted in the development of a new five-year strategic plan along with refreshed **vision, mission, and core values.**

Organizational Foundations

- Revised Employee Handbook
 - Restructured administrative team meetings to support strategic alignment
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LOOKING AHEAD

Year Zero focused on building the organizational foundation necessary for long-term success.

The work completed this year positions SOESD to:

- Implement its five-year strategic plan
- Strengthen partnerships with districts and community organizations
- Modernize facilities and systems
- Support a thriving and collaborative organizational culture

As SOESD moves into the next phase of strategic implementation, these foundational investments will support continued innovation, partnership, and service to the children, families, educators, and communities of Southern Oregon.