

# DISTRICT 45

## Phase 1 Community Engagement Report

At District 45, we are empowering all learners to cultivate hope, build confidence, and realize their full potential.

Our recent work together to improve our students' academic performance is beginning to show results. However, our academic gains are at risk. District 45 is funded at only 85% of adequacy, operating with nearly \$8 million less per year than recommended.

The current district leadership team, led by the new superintendent and a fiscally responsible board, have actively worked to improve the district's finances. However, with deficits projected in future years, unless the district receives additional funding, difficult decisions will need to be made to balance the budget as early as March of 2026. This includes teacher layoffs, larger class sizes, reduced programming, decreased staff and student support, delayed facility maintenance, and, if finances continue to get worse, building closures and redistricting.

In District 45, we trust our community and value open, honest discussions. That's why we are transparently communicating our financial situation to the public and launching a community engagement process to decide together how we would like to proceed. We are encouraging everyone in our community to provide their perspectives as we collaborate on a plan for the future of our schools.

As part of that effort, District 45 began taking active steps in October to engage the community and solicit feedback. During Phase 1 of this process, we developed messaging, recruited a community-based committee to lead these efforts, coordinated a discussion with the Community Committee, and engaged the community digitally to discuss the district's successes, opportunities for improvement, and obstacles ahead.

Feedback from the community was documented during this time through notes taken of all direct communications, feedback provided on digital forms at the Community Committee meeting, and responses to a feedback form available to the public on the district's website. We received strong levels of engagement so far, with 156 residents participating through the community committee and online during Phase 1. The community is clearly engaged in determining the district's path forward.

We will continue our efforts to engage the community in the coming months to determine the vision of our schools going forward. In Phase 2, we will take the feedback gathered in Phase 1 and create a "menu" of possible negative effects, opportunities and funding levels for discussion. We will present this menu to the Community Committee and the general public, along with additional information on each item including advantages and disadvantages of each and associated costs. Feedback will be solicited directly, on feedback forms at Community Committee meetings and public engagement sessions, online on the district's website, and through a public phone survey. Phase 2 will be conducted in November, with reports made regularly to the district, including a Phase 2 report presented to the school board in December.

## **Messaging**

We developed messaging to properly communicate how we got to this point, what our successes and challenges have been, and how to approach the path forward. This messaging detailed recent progression and improvements as well as the district's funding challenges and limited opportunities as a result. The key takeaways from the messaging are below, and a full copy of the messaging is provided with this report.

- At District 45, we are empowering all learners to cultivate hope, build confidence, and realize their full potential.
- Regardless of circumstances or backgrounds, every student in our district is given the opportunities and support they need to succeed.
- Our recent work together to improve our students' academic performance is beginning to show results.
- Many of these improvements would not have been possible without the community's overwhelming approval of a \$30 million bond referendum in 2020.
- However, our academic gains are at risk. District 45 is funded at only 85% of adequacy according to the State Board of Education, operating with nearly \$8 million less per year than recommended.
- The current district leadership team, led by the new superintendent and a fiscally responsible board, have actively worked to improve the district's finances.
- However, with deficits projected in future years, unless the district receives additional funding, difficult decisions will need to be made to balance the budget as early as March of 2026.
- In District 45, we trust our community and value open, honest discussions. That's why we are transparently communicating our financial situation to the public and launching a community engagement process to decide together how we would like to proceed.
- If we can solve these challenges together, we will be able to provide our students the opportunities they deserve—opportunities afforded to kids in other school districts.

## **Community Committee**

We developed a committee of individuals who will provide direct, informed input throughout this effort. The committee is made up of a cross-section of District 45 stakeholders, including parents, taxpayers without children in the district, business owners, seniors, teachers, and elected officials. The committee has been formalized and tasked with the responsibility of actively gathering feedback from the community to determine what they would like to see for the future of District 45. The first Community Committee meeting took place October 28 and the second committee meeting occurred November 17. Committee engagement will continue throughout all phases of this process.

## **Public Engagement**

The district posted the Phase 1 presentation and feedback form on the community engagement website and promoted it through emails to members of the community. As a result, 130 members of the community visited the website and completed the online feedback form.

During Phase 2, we will host three public engagement sessions (two in person and one virtual) to ensure the public has numerous opportunities to participate, with community input continuing to drive the process.

## **Feedback Report**

Attached is a detailed report of the feedback that was collected during Phase 1 of this process, which includes feedback from the Community Committee and the public via the online feedback form on the district website.