Strategic Plan

2023-2026



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Here in Fresno County, we are excited to look to the future and imagine the many accomplishments of our students. We know that the hopes and dreams of parents are nurtured in classrooms throughout our county and the Office of the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools (FCSS) is proud to be involved in their fulfillment. Our office has engaged in a strategic planning process to better align our work to the needs of our students and community. Before a pilot takes off from the runway, she reviews her flight plan to ensure passengers arrive safely at their destination. Just like a flight plan, our strategic plan is a document that will guide our decision making, our actions and our connections with the community, all to ensure students succeed in their educational endeavors.

The County of Fresno is a vibrant community where hard work and dedication are valued. Our lush Valley is home to a diverse population with rich cultures and strong family values. Our districts have a history of dedicated service to their students, and we strive to support that work with high-quality programs, service and events. While the County of Fresno is an amazing place, we still have a great deal of work to do. The pandemic impacted opportunities to learn and significant variance in achievement exists among student groups. Recognizing and prioritizing this reality is central to the work of our strategic plan.

You will see through this strategic plan that FCSS is committed to working with districts across all areas and disciplines of education to ensure equitable access for all students. We seek to provide support alongside amazing district and school site staff in curriculum and instruction, finance, early learning, leadership, community engagement and many other areas that we know impact all Fresno County students. FCSS is dedicated to meeting the needs of ALL students by providing what they need, when they need it.

After listening to our staff, students, districts, and the Fresno County community, it is clear that the objective of the strategic plan is to align our work to those elements that impact students most. We are excited to continue this process, knowing that we will adapt and align our work using data collected by our departments and through feedback from our partners. The Office of the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools is known for outstanding work, and we will build upon that reputation as we strive to have a greater impact on student learning and engagement.

We look forward to you joining us on our journey.

Dr. Michele Cantwell-Copher

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools





Vision

Every student in Fresno County will thrive in a challenging, supportive, and inclusive environment leading to limitless possibilities.

Mission

The Office of the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools provides educational leadership, fosters partnerships and coordinates services to districts to ensure equitable opportunities for ALL students.

Priorities

- Student safety, engagement, and social-emotional wellness
- · Student achievement
- · Youth, family, and community voice
- Responsive community leadership
- Internal support and development

Values

Prioritize the Needs of Students

We create learning environments that cater to students' individual strengths, providing access to quality resources and support, and ensuring their well-being and safety are at the forefront of decision-making processes. We provide data-driven leadership support in order to improve equitable student outcomes.

Equity

We ensure fair and just opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances. This involves actively identifying and addressing disparities and barriers that prevent equal access to resources, opportunities, and outcomes, with the goal of creating a more inclusive and equitable community.

Service to Others

We seek to build relationships with students, parents, districts and the community to better provide exemplary service in the educational space. We work to develop expertise to ensure that service is of the highest quality to enable the greatest impact.

Continuous Improvement

We are dedicated to the ongoing process of seeking out ways to enhance performance, outcomes, and processes. We espouse a mindset of constantly evaluating, learning from feedback and experiences, and implementing changes and innovations to drive progress and achieve higher levels of effectiveness and efficiency.

Fresno County at a Glance

Fresno County, located in the heart of California's Central Valley, is a vibrant and diverse region known for its agricultural richness, natural beauty and cultural heritage. With a population of over one million people, Fresno County is the fifth-largest county in California and offers a mix of urban and rural communities. The county is home to the city of Fresno, which serves as the economic, educational and cultural hub of the region. Fresno County boasts a diverse economy, with agriculture, healthcare, education, and manufacturing being major sectors. The county also offers a variety of recreational opportunities, including national parks, hiking trails and cultural events, making it an attractive destination for residents and visitors alike.

Education in Fresno County is a dynamic and comprehensive system that strives to provide quality learning opportunities for students across the region. Fresno County is home to a diverse range of public, private and charter schools that cater to the educational needs of students from pre-kindergarten through high school. The county is also home to several institutions of higher education, including Fresno State, Fresno Pacific University, and community colleges of the State Center Community College District, offering a variety of academic and vocational programs. With a focus on innovation, equity and student success, Fresno County's education system endeavors to prepare students for a successful future and contribute to the growth and development of the community.

Academic achievement in Fresno County is a priority for educators and other educational partners in the region. While there are pockets of excellence, the county faces challenges in achieving consistent academic performance across all schools. Student achievement is measured through various metrics, including standardized test scores, graduation rates and college readiness indicators. Efforts are being made to address achievement gaps and improve educational outcomes for all students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Collaborative initiatives, such as targeted interventions, professional development for educators and community partnerships, are being implemented to support student success. Despite the existing challenges, FCSS remains committed to enhancing academic achievement and preparing students for post-secondary education and future career opportunities.





State Required Roles of a County Office

County offices of education play a crucial role in California's education system. These offices serve as an intermediary between the state Department of Education and local school districts, providing essential support and resources to ensure the success of students and schools. First and foremost, county offices of education offer a wide range of services to school districts, such as professional development for teachers, curriculum development and support and fiscal oversight. They are vital in ensuring that schools have access to the necessary tools and knowledge to deliver high-quality education to students.

County offices of education also ensure compliance from districts with some state and federal regulations. They provide guidance and support to local districts in matters of legal compliance, special education services and student assessment. County offices also oversee the implementation of statewide initiatives and policies within their respective regions, working closely with district administrators to ensure alignment and accountability.

State Required Roles of a County Superintendent

The role of a California County Superintendent of Schools is multifaceted and carries significant responsibilities. As the top education administrator in the county, the superintendent is responsible for overseeing the operations of the county office of education and providing leadership to local school districts. This includes implementing state education policies, ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements and promoting educational excellence. Additionally, the county superintendent plays a crucial role in fostering collaboration and partnerships among various educational partners, including school administrators, teachers, parents, and community organizations. The superintendent has direct oversight responsibilities for approving and assuring school district budgets, calling school district elections, and assisting with school district emergencies by providing necessary services. The superintendent is also tasked with developing a three-year Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) for the schools operated by the county office and reviewing and approving the LCAPs for all school districts in Fresno County.











January

Launch Strategic Planning Process with Cabinet

February/March

Gather and Analyze Data Through Surveys, Interviews, Focus Groups and the CA Dashboard Involves: District Leadership, FCSS Staff, Community Partners, and Students

Development Process

The development of this Strategic Plan was an intentional five-month process that included the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The process began with the FCSS Cabinet in January of 2023 taking an assets-based look at the qualities that already exist within the organization. The FCSS Cabinet also took a deep dive into Fresno County student data to identify where the highest points of need exist. Both the FCSS Cabinet and FCSS Leadership Teams participated in activities over the course of three months that helped guide the data collection and analysis process. These activities focused on gaining clarity around these four questions:

- Who is our customer?
- What problems should FCSS focus on solving?
- What does it mean to pursue equity?
- How do we measure our success?

The activities included structured discussions and deep data dives, along with the use of improvement protocols, such as a Force Field Analysis and Affinity Protocol.

Understanding the importance of a 360-degree approach to this work, the strategic planning team spent the months of February and March collecting data from over 600 employees, 190 students, 12 districts and over 40 board and community members.

The data sources included:

- Listening sessions with Fresno County superintendents
- Key informant interviews with board of education members and community partners
- · Staff and student surveys
- Listening sessions with the Superintendent's Community Advisory Council
- Multiple input sessions with FCSS Cabinet and FCSS Leadership Teams

A consultant was also hired to conduct and synthesize all the interviews and focus groups to promote honesty in responses and an unbiased approach to analyzing the data.



April

Draft Strategic Plan Recommendations including Vision, Values, Beliefs, Mission, Goals, and Objectives

Final components determined based on data analysis by FCSS leadership

May/June

Draft Strategic Plan and Gather Draft Feedback Final Draft Complete

These diverse educational partners shared their perspectives about who we are and what we do. They gave positive feedback on areas where we shine and they gave constructive criticism around areas for improvement. Key themes included:

FCSS' Strengths to Build on:

- A service-centered organization with a clear priority to serve students.
- Knowledgeable and professional and is trusted to help support districts and the community when there is a need.
- Collaborative and supportive. FCSS is seen as an indispensable support, especially for the smaller districts that are served within Fresno County.
- Resourceful. When problems arise, districts confidently turn to FCSS for help solving them using innovative and collaborative means.

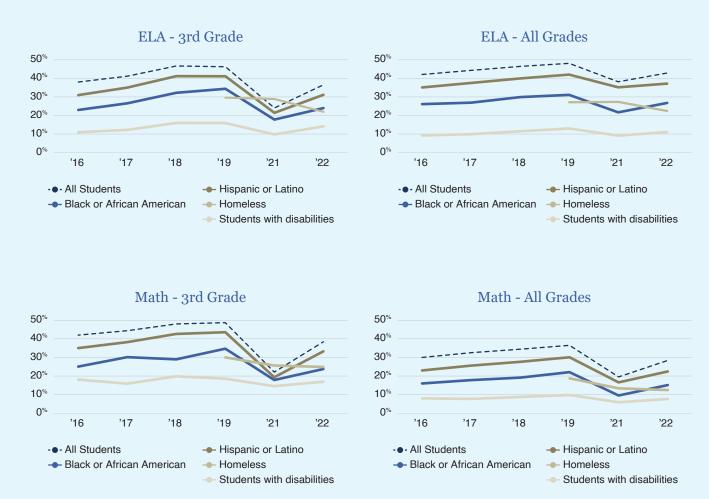
Great people who are a part of the organization.
 Overwhelmingly, employees of FCSS love the teams they work with and continually refer to their teams as family and friends.

FCSS' Areas of Improvement:

- Lean into the pursuit of equity at all levels across all departments.
- See themselves as a leader in leveraging resources across sectors (e.g. healthcare, business, government, higher education, housing) to provide streamlined services for every student in every district.
- Create more opportunities for feedback from all educational partners (students, families and internal staff).

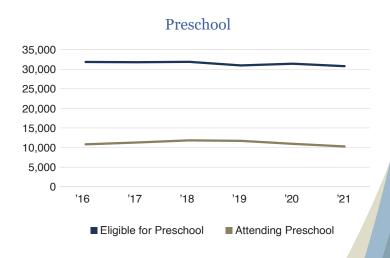
Academic Excellence

Academic excellence is a priority for this office and Fresno County has experienced some success, but has a way to go. 43% of all students have met or exceeded the English Language Arts (ELA) standards, while only 37% of 3rd grade students have. In math, 29% of all students have met or exceeded standards with 39% of 3rd grade students doing so.



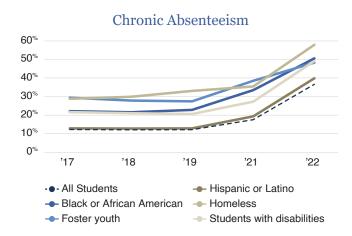
Preschool

Approximately one-third of Fresno County students eligible attend some type of preschool program. This number was climbing prior to the pandemic, but has dropped sharply over the last two years. Fresno County is working to provide increased services to families to encourage participation in these programs that develop vital skills in children.



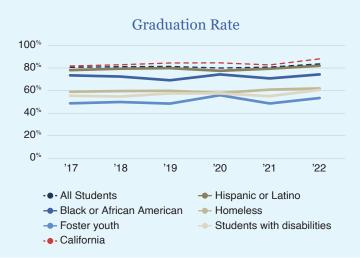
Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism, missing 10% or more of a student's days enrolled, is of concern in Fresno County, as well as across California. The work with our population of students who are experiencing homelessness is critical as they currently have a rate of 51.6%. On average, African American students missed 25% of their school days in 2021-22, while homeless students missed 30%. This equates to 218,289 days of school missed by African American students and 63,682 for homeless youth.



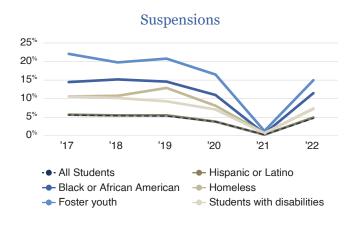
Graduation Rate

The graduation rate in Fresno County lags the State of California by 3%. There are greater areas of need with our African American students (4.1%), foster youth (8%) and students experiencing homelessness (9.1%). Students with disabilities had a graduation rate of 60.7% for 2021-22. This statistic is higher than any previous year (17-18 through 20-21 averaged 56.3%).



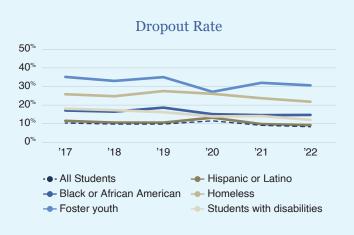
Suspensions

In the 2021-22 school year, Foster Youth (15% suspension rate) and African American students (12%) were suspended at a rate more than double most other student groups (the all students rate was 4.7%). This gap has existed since at least 2016-17. Students with disabilities are still suspended at a rate higher than the general population, but this gap has been closing in recent years as fewer students in this group are suspended.



Dropout Rate

While the overall dropout rate has steadily declined over three years to 8%, African American students continue to dropout at a rate of about 14% per cohort, with homeless youth at 21.6% (declining year-over-year), and foster youth at 30.5% in 2021-22 while also experiencing large shifts in their year-over-year dropout rate. Students with disabilities had a 5.3% decrease in dropouts over five years.





Student Safety, Engagement & Social-Emotional Wellness

There was a theme throughout the data collected that the role of FCSS is to focus on the needs of the "whole child." High student achievement is often a result of a support system that is purposeful in meeting all the needs of every student. Whether that is helping students to feel safe on campus or providing them with the social and emotional support they need to thrive, it is clear that the role of FCSS is to learn what needs are most prevalent and find ways to meet those needs.

Only 70% of students surveyed felt completely safe on their campus. FCSS is committed to amplifying the voice of our youth and providing the support they need so that 100% feel safe. Internally, there was an overall sense that FCSS has a variety of services to meet the needs of every child, but those services need to be improved. Internal staff called for more individualized services and suggested working to promote excellence in the services we already provide rather than adding more.

Community partners see FCSS as a hub that has the potential to lead the way in leveraging resources across the community to meet the needs of every child. Whether that is creating a platform to share data across sectors or leveraging their voice as advocates at the state level, FCSS is primed to create partnerships that promote service to the whole child. "FCSS is a big institution. I want them to be vocal, to amplify our message." – Community Member

We are committed to this by:

- Promoting equity in action by highlighting bestpractices in our county schools that promote the mental, physical, and emotional safety of every child.
- Providing more opportunities for student focus groups to problem-solve together and create action plans to support a greater sense of safety across campuses.
- Continuing to pursue relationships across sectors to fill the gaps that the educational sector cannot fill on its own.
- Continue to offer outstanding mental health services to students through All 4 Youth.

- Tracking official FCSS partnerships across sectors.
- Measuring the number of opportunities students across all student groups have to participate in meaningful decision-making around programs to meet their needs.
- Measuring students' sense of safety and connectedness on a regular basis.
- Tracking the number of referrals for mental health services by district.



Student Achievement

It is not surprising that almost everyone who provided feedback believes that it is the top priority of FCSS to ensure all students have access to a high-quality education in order to improve student achievement. Community members and superintendents agree that our top priority should be to provide academic programs and guide curriculum development across the county. Our data show that currently, our students are not performing as well as we want them to and there are inequitable outcomes across our 32 districts. When asked, "What problems should FCSS be focused on solving?" The majority response was problems

around disproportionate student outcomes. Many specific student groups were called out, including students living with a disability, students from rural communities and black and brown students. Our data also reflected a significant need to focus on the support of students in the foster system and students experiencing homelessness. We understand that a high-quality education does not start in kindergarten, rather it begins at birth, and we are committed to finding ways to measure the success of the entire system – birth through career.

We are committed to this by:

- Developing, piloting, and adopting innovative approaches to instruction and instructional support.
- Creating the infrastructure for data sharing across sectors to better track the success of all children in Fresno County from birth through college.
- Deepening partnerships with community colleges, universities, and industry.
- Regularly disaggregating data to identify students with the greatest gaps in outcomes.
- Continuing to provide programs and resources that are responsive to current needs.

- California Dashboard and assessment data annually reported through an FCSS-developed dashboard.
- Fully executed data sharing agreements with districts and community partners.
- Tracking the number of programs and resources provided annually.



Youth, Family & Community Voice

Through the feedback from multiple partner groups, it was evident that there are not enough opportunities for students and families to have a voice in the educational system. Suggestions from both staff and students made it clear that one way to pursue equity as an organization is to listen to the voices of those who we don't often hear from. One staff member said that it is our responsibil-

ity to "provide an opportunity for those without a platform" to be heard. The data was clear that this is especially important for our students from traditionally underserved communities. "The opportunity to feel seen, heard and thought of would benefit me and others greatly" (CTEC student). FCSS is committed to prioritizing the voices of our youth, their families, and the communities in which they live.

We are committed to this by:

- Increasing the number of student leadership councils.
- Creating regular routines for gathering student, family and community feedback on issues that are most important to them and assuring that they know how to get involved with those opportunities.
- Leveraging community organizations who already have systems in place for listening to community voice.

- Measuring the number of opportunities students from all background have to participate in meaningful decision-making around programs to meet their needs.
- Surveys collected from departments that directly interface with parents and the community. For example, Safe & Healthy Kids, Curriculum & Instruction and Cradle to Career (C2C).



Responsive Community Leadership

Based on many responses from staff, district leaders and community members, it is a priority of FCSS to emulate responsive community leadership, which is characterized by leaders who actively engage with and listen to the needs, concerns and aspirations of the community they serve. We as leaders prioritize open communication and collaboration, fostering an environment where community members feel empowered to contribute their ideas and perspectives.

We must understand the importance of being accessible, approachable and accountable to the community, seeking input and feedback to inform decision-making processes. Our work with Community Schools throughout the region will be a guiding light for our efforts in the community. By forging strong connections and partnerships across the County of Fresno, we can facilitate positive change, promote sustainable development and cultivate a sense of unity and resilience within our community.

We are committed to this by:

- Hosting the Superintendent's Community Advisory Council as a learning space for identifying the cross-sector needs that exist in Fresno County.
- Elevating our work around the establishment of Community Schools across the region, assuring the voices of the community are leading the way in the development of systems put in place to support the Community Schools rollout.

- · Annual Community School reporting.
- Surveys collected from departments that directly interface with parents and the community. For example, Safe & Healthy Kids, Curriculum & Instruction and Cradle to Career (C2C).
- Regularly collecting feedback from the Superintendent's Community Advisory Council.



Internal Support & Development

The staff of FCSS are eager to learn and grow. They made it clear that, as an organization, we value personal development and opportunities for furthering our own education so that we can successfully meet the needs of the communities we serve. Staff mentioned a desire for further cross-department support and development around areas such as: teamwork, equity, leadership, management responsibilities (budgeting,

evaluations, etc.), technology and student safety, as well as a need for more job-specific training. FCSS values continuous improvement so we are committed to providing opportunities for our staff to fulfill their own capacities by providing space for learning. Not only will this help to provide a more fulfilling work experience, it will translate to better service for the students and districts in Fresno County.

We are committed to this by:

- Creating opportunities for internal leadership development.
- Supporting the ongoing training of staff through the Educator Effectiveness program.
- Developing opportunities for staff to grow through internal expertise and training.

- The number of staff who participate in Educator Effectiveness training, leadership training and offered internal professional learning opportunities.
- A needs assessment that identifies areas of interest from current staff.
- · A calendar of ongoing training opportunities.



Progress Monitoring

Over the next three years we will work to monitor our progress towards the objectives outlined in this Strategic Plan. We will focus on the collection, analysis and interpretation of relevant data and performance metrics to gauge the effectiveness and efficiency of our efforts. By monitoring our progress, we will gain

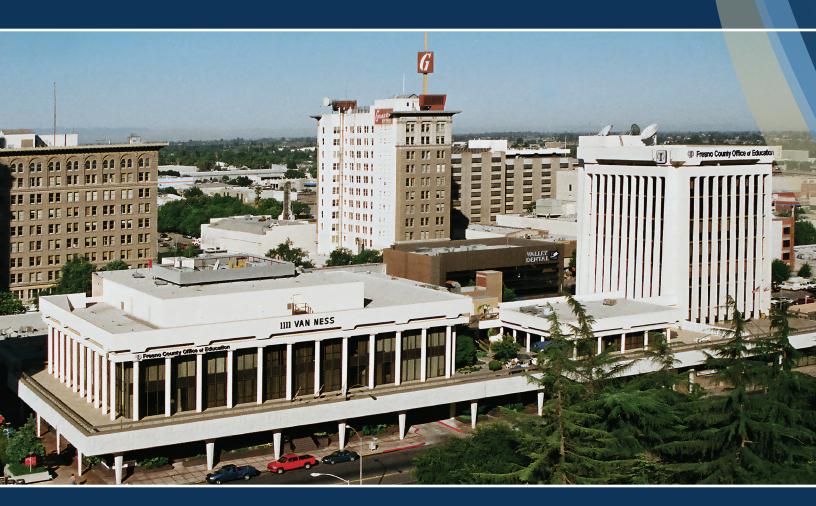
valuable insights into our overall performance, identify areas for improvement and make informed decisions to optimize productivity and outcomes in our work. This practice enables our teams to ensure alignment with the strategic objectives, fostering a culture of accountability and continuous improvement within FCSS.

	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb l	March	April
Department Leads and Teams Review department goals and submit annual report on progress	✓	✓	✓									
FCSS Leadership Team Review progress towards department goals and FCSS strategic priorities	√				✓			✓			✓	
Cabinet Review of progress on priorities				✓				✓	✓			
Superintendent's Office Annual report on progress of strategic plan										/	/	

To ensure we are working towards our plan we will do the following:

- An FCSS dashboard will be developed to monitor progress on the county indicators reported at the beginning of this plan.
- Each department will develop annual goals that are aligned to the priorities of this strategic plan. These department goals will be analyzed and reported on annually. A template will be developed to report the goals and their outcomes.
- Cabinet and FCSS leadership will also review this plan on a regular basis and track progress on each priority.
- An annual report will be published internally to report progress on each priority.





SUPERINTENDENT

Dr. Michele Cantwell-Copher

FRESNO COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Kimberly Tapscott-Munson – Area 1

Bryan Burton – Area 2

James Martinez – Area 3

Dr. Marcy Masumoto – Area 4

Dr. Allen Clyde – Area 5