The Sun Prairie Area School District is one of the largest public school districts in Wisconsin. It currently serves over 8,400 students from grades 4K-12. We have two full-time communications staff members. Our team also consists of a part-time administrative specialist and a part-time intern.

**PROJECT SYNOPSIS:** In 2014-15, before the hiring of Superintendent Dr. Brad Saron, the Sun Prairie Area School District created a strategic plan aiming to evolve and improve for their community, students, caregivers, and families. The plan was collaboratively created with community members focusing on four main pillars: teaching and learning, workforce, community engagement, and facilities and operations.

To learn about our accomplishments and the success of our first strategic plan, visit our Six Years of Continuous Improvement website or view the report sent to our 23,000 community members.

In October 2021, it was time to begin drafting our second-ever strategic plan. While we recognize we accomplished a lot, we also recognize there is still plenty of work to do. “Our community is learning, growing, and changing, so we must check in with them to make sure our
strategic direction is keeping up to the evolving needs and priorities of our community,” said Superintendent Brad Saron. The strategic plan aims to help the District better achieve its mission of inspiring and preparing every child, every day, by providing relevant, engaging, and innovative learning experiences in and out of the classroom.

The District is becoming increasingly diverse and district leadership recognized the importance of hearing from its diverse voices and stakeholders. This is important because according to the National Committee for Citizens in Education, “The degree of parent and community interest in high-quality education is the critical factor in the impact of the school environment on the achievement and educational aspirations of students.”

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** The Sun Prairie community, District Leadership, staff members, caregivers, and families

**RESEARCH & PLANNING:** To begin, we identified an engagement initiative to help our District refine and refresh our current Strategic Plan’s value statements and pillars/goals. These can be found [here](#).

Next, we analyzed what went well and did not go well in the creation of our previous Strategic Plan. In the creation of the previous Strategic Plan, we conducted 60 SWOT analysis meetings with different community stakeholders and facilitated a conversation with over 50 community members. We decided that instead of facilitating one large conversation, it would be better to conduct individual conversations. We also aimed to find more convenient ways for community members to provide feedback, ultimately concluding it is necessary to include digital options for participation.

Additionally, we brainstormed important topics and themes needing to be addressed in our upcoming Strategic Plan. Our District is expanding and is preparing for the opening of our second high school and third middle school. We discussed how this will impact our Strategic Plan with Facilities team members.

In the creation of the upcoming Strategic Plan, we strived to involve a greater percentage of our community. District leadership met to think of ways to increase participation and engagement from our community. We brainstormed incentives for people to participate and what days/times would work best for different stakeholders. Additionally, we concluded it was necessary to communicate with stakeholders in both English and Spanish. Our District has multiple bilingual assistants who assisted the Communications Department with translation.

Our goal was to increase participation by over 50% from our previous Strategic Plan. Also, we strived to engage diverse stakeholders who accurately represent the community we serve.
IMPLEMENTATION: Following discussions with members of the District leadership team, we created the following timeline:

One way we engaged stakeholders was by conducting Relational Interviews beginning Oct. 25, 2021. District staff scheduled interviews to meet with District Representatives to discuss their thoughts and opinions regarding what the District can improve upon.

Next, we created ‘Two-Question Tuesdays.’ Every Tuesday, we posted two-question surveys on our social media accounts and website. Stakeholders also had the option of taking the full survey all at once. It was available in both English and Spanish. Below are the links to the surveys:
- Week #1 (Oct. 26-Nov. 1)
- Week #2 (Nov. 2-8)
- Week #3 (Nov. 9-15)
- Week #4 (Nov. 16-23)

Another way we engaged stakeholders was by hosting two interactive in-person ‘Ideas Fairs.’ One took place on Nov. 11, 2021, and the other took place on Nov. 18, 2021. Community members were able to explore ideas, hear from others, and share their input and feedback on key priorities for the District in the coming years.

Interactive stations were set up throughout the high school’s cafeteria. At each, attendees discussed different themes or problems needing to be addressed. Topics ranged from diversity to extracurricular opportunities. Below is a picture of one of the stations. In addition to answering the questions from their unique perspectives, participants were assigned a persona to answer through the lens of that student and their situation.
A diverse group of 12 committee members was invited to participate on a strategic planning committee. The committee reviewed the survey results, the Ideas Fair feedback, and the relational interview results. Throughout six meetings, the group collaboratively put together the strategic plan pillars for the next five years.

The local newspaper, the Sun Prairie Star, published an article about the District’s desire for community involvement throughout this process. It included information regarding the tactics explained previously. The Communications team continuously monitored the Strategic Plan webpage’s traffic as well.

**EVALUATION:** The Sun Prairie Area School District and our Communications team are very proud of our increased focus on engaging our community in the creation of our Strategic Plan. Our community is becoming increasingly diverse and it was beneficial to hear from a wide array of different stakeholders. We engaged over 500 community members in this process. Additionally, our Strategic Plan webpage is one of our most frequently visited pages. The Six Years of Continuous Improvement report was mailed to over 23,000 community members and is also available online. We are excited to use the data gathered to guide the creation of our upcoming Strategic Plan and the future of our District.