

# Finneytown Local School District

*Vision: Be a learning community that inspires our students and staff to think critically, grow intellectually, and live with integrity*

**Mission: To foster academic and social growth for each student in a safe & supportive school environment**

THINK critically, GROW intellectually, and LIVE with integrity

**Think Grow Live**

TGL

Dear Finneytown Families,

September 26, 2018

It is time for an update on the state of the district. We completed our five year Strategic Plan with amazing help from parents, community, staff, and students. The State Report Cards have just been released, so the timing is wonderful. The state issued the district a letter grade of D. We are not satisfied with that grade and will continue to strive to improve. I'll share the current practices and plans for the future. I'll provide you with an update on the status of the funding from the state for new facilities in Finneytown. Finally, I want to tell you about an amazing opportunity we have been given.

From our Strategic Plan (SP) work, we used the input from students, staff, parents, and community to develop our mission and vision statements. You will see those at the top of this letter along with our motto. That was a good start but the SP is so much more. From the data collected, we created goals around 5 major areas: Student Learning, School Culture, Facilities, Communication, and Budget and Sustainable Funding. Under each area, we devised goals and action steps to reach those goals. We also included ways to measure our progress. (link to Strategic Plan

[http://www.finneytown.org/media/documents/Finneytown\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_r1-0.pdf](http://www.finneytown.org/media/documents/Finneytown_Strategic_Plan_r1-0.pdf))

This SP will guide us over the next 5 years of decision making. It is a guide that we will continue to review and revise as we go. It is like a plan for a road trip. Once you decide where you want to go, it tells you how and what you need to do to get there. On a road trip you often run into construction or become aware of things you want to do or see as you go along. That will apply to our next five years with the SP as well. Legislation may change, there may be detours, and, we may discover some wonderful new innovations to try as we go. The Strategic Plan is our guide to keep reminding us of our goals and where we want to go. Decisions will be made with this in mind. Purchases and professional development will align with the plan. As our vision tells us we want to be a learning community that inspires our students and staff to think critically, grow intellectually, and live with integrity. Our Strategic Plan is the guide to help us get to that vision.

This is the first year the state has issued an overall grade for schools and districts. The state issued the district a letter grade of D (.005 or 5/1000 from a C). We are not satisfied with this grade and will continue to strive to improve. Even though we do not feel that it represents what takes place in our buildings each day, it is the measure we have been given. There are many positive improvements on the Report Card this year and I will also tell you about some of the successes not included on it. Here is a 3 year comparison of our report card data:

Year	OVERALL GRADUATION RATE	ACHIEVEMENT COMPONENT GRADUATION RATE	PERFORMANCE INDEX SCORE GRADUATION RATE	INDICATORS MET GRADUATION RATE	PROGRESS COMPONENT GRADUATION RATE	OVERALL VALUE-ADDED GRADUATION RATE	GIFTED VALUE-ADDED GRADUATION RATE	LOWEST 20% VALUE-ADDED GRADUATION RATE	SWD VALUE-ADDED GRADUATION RATE
2017-2018	D	D	D	F	F	F	F	F	F
2016-2017		D	D	F	F	F	F	F	F
2015-2016		D	D	F	F	F	F	F	F

Year	GAP CLOSING COMPONENT	GRADUATION COMPONENT	4-YEAR GRADUATION RATE GRADE	5-YEAR GRADUATION RATE GRADE	IMPROVING AT-RISK K-3 READERS COMPONENT	PREPARED FOR SUCCESS COMPONENT
2017-2018	B	B	A	B	C	D
2016-2017	F	C	B	C	B	D
2015-2016	F	C	D	B	D	C

In reviewing the chart (from the bottom up), you will see we made gains in two areas (highlighted in green) from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017 and lost ground in two other areas. From 2016-2017 to 2017-2018, we made gains in 4 areas and went down one letter in one area. The improvements we made almost earned us a C rating, but it is not nearly enough. We implemented some strategies this year for academics and behavior that will go a long way to helping us improve even more. While it is important

to improve student scores for public awareness, it's more important that we meet the needs of our students so they find success in education and life.

Students identified as Gifted at Whitaker and the Secondary Campus now have additional opportunities for challenge and advancement. Although we have offered advanced classes and Advanced Placement (AP) classes for many years at Finneytown, these did not provide the necessary points for the report cards due to limited staff endorsements of highly qualified (HQ) gifted education instructor status. At some point, the rules changed and teachers who were certified to teach AP classes were not considered HQ for gifted education. We took steps last year to fix that, and some of our instructors took it upon themselves at their own expense to take the courses needed to attain this endorsement. Then, over the summer, the state passed legislation that once again recognizes that a teacher who gets certified to teach AP, IB, CCP or other advanced classes should also be considered HQ to teach gifted education. That helped us even more. We can now write education plans for each gifted or accelerated student and report them to the state as receiving services from HQ teachers, and that will count on the report card next year.

In addition, we expanded our services to students in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, & 5<sup>th</sup> grades to allow many more students to receive gifted education services, and we have support in all core areas not just one or two subjects. Most importantly, this will help our students stretch and reach for higher learning, and it will help positively affect our score. With the cooperation of the other teachers in the buildings, our Gifted Education staff are able to work with all students who have been identified gifted in one or all areas. These students will be able to move forward rapidly in areas where they excel and gain support in the areas where they don't excel. It is a new challenge for our staff but they are amazing and will make this a success.

We have also restructured some of the supports offered in each building to maximize the potential for each student and staff member. I sent you information about our change in mental health providers earlier this year. We will see the new therapists from Catalyst Counseling, LLC in our schools very soon. The Secondary Campus will start with 2 people and there will be one person at Whitaker and one at Brent. We have also increased our support of students who are struggling to follow the rules in class or, as I like to say, don't know how to play school. We want our students to be successful in every way and we put supports in place to help. This is a fluid process. We will tweak things as we go to help the support be stronger and more effective. Instead of sharing one person with all three buildings as we did last year, we now have a person dedicated to this at each building. Principals and staff came together to create guidelines for behavior issues and are working together to help keep classes conducive to learning.

Many staff attended classes and training this summer to improve their engagement of students through use of technology, relationship building, classroom management, school-wide discipline, PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Supports) at the elementaries, the HOUSE system at the Secondary Campus, RTI (Response to Intervention), curriculum mapping, and formative assessments. As an administrative team, we also attended training and will be working with Focus3 on Lead Now training. We sent staff to restorative justice training which will slowly be implemented. Several staff members went to academic training on new standards being implemented and curricular offerings old and new. Our very dedicated staff spent a good chunk of their summer striving to improve the classroom and school experience for

your children. This shows their dedication to your children and how much they care about the success of our students.

On August 1<sup>st</sup> over 60 staff and students gave their time once again for our first ever Community Outreach. We boarded buses to take us into the community. We drove and walked through our neighborhoods with our drumlines leading the way. It was awesome to see students and families welcoming and embracing us. The excitement was overwhelming! It made us all eager for school to start.

The district staff struggled right alongside your students in the horribly hot buildings at the beginning of this school year. Even in the heat, teachers were teaching and students were learning. All were sweating. This is not the best environment and certainly not what our students and staff deserve. It was so hot the one week, we had to close the buildings. Classrooms were over 100 degrees on the heat index scale with the windows open and fans going. In that type of heat and humidity, it becomes too dangerous for students and staff, so closing was the only option. The rest of the time, we have provided water and teachers have brought in ice and other things to cool off their students. As always, our very professional staff makes it work and kept teaching. Our amazing students kept learning. Parents brought in water and ice as well and supported in many other ways. I am so proud to be a part of this district and community.

In March of this year, we found out the state ran out of funds for building new schools. After over 35 meetings with community and staff in the first 3 months of the year, we came to a screeching halt in our efforts. We literally found out about this a couple of hours before the Board meeting with the decision about one building or two on the agenda. The Board did approve the community recommended master plan of building two buildings, but the next steps were in limbo.

In the 6 months since then, the OFCC (Ohio Facility Construction Commission) has undergone some changes. There is a new CEO. Our representative retired and we were assigned to another person. The new biennium budget started on July 1, 2018. I have been given many renditions of when and how we will qualify for funding in the future as these changes took place.

Here is what we now know. The OFCC has already committed the entire two year budget of new construction funds. We are still in the top 10 of the list (WE WERE #3). The best way for us to go forward is by completing an "At Risk" packet in 2019 and securing our local funding by the end of 2019 if possible. That would mean being on the ballot for a bond levy in November of 2019. Early in 2020, the OFCC will know what the next biennium (2 year) budget will be and can let us know for sure that we would be funded in July of 2020. The new biennium budget will go into effect July 1, 2020. If we do not secure our local share, we will not go to the top of the list and will not be considered for matching funds for that biennium budget.

This is called "At Risk" because we have to make some decisions about the unknown. We have to predict the costs of the project with the following included.

- Inflation for one or two years normally at 3% a year because we would have to be approved by OFCC before beginning the project

- Changes to construction mandates and norms
- Property values could go up or down here and in other parts of Ohio
  - That could impact the matching percentage which is currently at 52%
- Fluctuation in construction costs

So, we have to look at all these risks, determine the cost of the project then fix the amount of millage that needs to be put on the ballot. At that point, a community group takes over and has to be out working to make sure it passes. A community group must take control because the district is not allowed to spend public funds to campaign for a levy. That means the district cannot print campaign flyers, mail home “please vote” postcards, or purchase signs. It has to be a community group that takes this on. As district employees, we cannot actively campaign. We can, I can, attend meetings, groups, and gatherings and share facts. I cannot share my opinion even though I live in the community. We can answer questions and provide data. We cannot run the campaign but we do not have to be silent.

This is where we stand. We heard loud and clear what our community had to say. We need to build new buildings instead of throwing money into continually patching the old ones. Our Board has committed to going forward. Since we know we need new facilities, we all feel it would be a huge mistake to pass up on the state paying for 52% of the cost. Once we pass a bond levy, we have up to 6 years to begin to sell the bonds. Until they are sold, there will be no cost to the community. I will continue to communicate as more information comes forward.

Another opportunity we have before us is the chance to get a quality turf field for the football stadium at almost no cost! All of the master plans we looked at during our 35 meetings included about 2 million dollars (not matched by the state funds) to put turf on the McNulty Stadium field. Our Athletic Director, Gerald Warmack, has been given the opportunity for our district to receive a 2 year old turf for free! A school is going to be replacing their turf. The costs associated would be transportation of about 10 miles to get it to our campus and the cost of installation. Mr. Warmack is getting estimates of those costs and will soon report to the Board members. He has also already been able to confirm about \$150,000.00 of donations for this endeavor. Our Booster Club has been setting money aside for this for a long time and will be donating about \$50,000.00 toward the costs. Mr. Warmack has secured another \$100,000.00 and is working hard to get enough donations to cover all costs. If this all happens, our district will get the almost new turf at no cost! This is an incredible opportunity and will save the tax payers \$2,000,000.00 off the estimated costs of building new buildings. We would not have been offered this great opportunity if Mr. Warmack didn't work here so this is another reason we are happy to have him here.

With his leadership as Athletic Director and Head Football Coach, our Football team won 2 games already this year. Not that I want to bring up the past but this is the first win in a few years. All teams are working hard, showing promise, and doing well. We continue to grow in this area as our students work long and hard to achieve success. Watch social media and our website for future scores. We've already had a chance to vote for one of our athletes as student of the week and our team as Athletes of the Week! Come see a game as it is quite exciting to see how much the athletes have prepared.

Finneytown has a strong tradition in Fine Arts. Our marching band has worked all summer and fall. They were an exemplary band last year and are quickly getting there this year. Competitions will go on

throughout the fall, and we will follow their success on social media and the website. Orchestra, Choir, Band at Whitaker, Voices of Whitaker, Music at Brent, and our solo and ensemble groups are all working hard. Music is alive at Finneytown!

Our Art department is going strong in all buildings. We have a new digital arts teacher and he is a good fit for our department. Students brought in top honors last year and the legacy continues. Students already have artwork on display in the secondary campus media center and on the walls in the halls of Whitaker and Brent. It is only the 6<sup>th</sup> week of school and our instructors are bringing out the talent in our students. Art is flourishing at Finneytown!

We have had a greater presence in the news this school year. We have been featured on WLWT-TV 5 & WXIX-TV. We have been in print and on the Internet at the Enquirer, Northwest Press, and have been the subject of many social media posts. Granted, some of the stories were because of closing for heat, but, others were for our Community Outreach, new staff, a 2017 graduate who just published a book as the Illustrator, and sports. We have had much more attention for what we do right than for problems and we want to keep it that way. There is always something amazing happening at Finneytown!

I almost forgot to let you know that there are some problems with the report card data. It has been reported to the state but we haven't heard anything yet. Let me give you just two examples. Last year we had about 130 6<sup>th</sup> graders. On the report card, scores for 6<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies were reported for 212 students. I have no idea where that came from. Another example is under the District Detail, Enrollment, Data Table. It lists the number of teachers with bachelor and master degrees and other data. It lists the number and percentage of students in subgroups like economically disadvantaged, ethnicity, English Language Learners (students for whom English was not their first language), and students with disabilities. Somehow, the number of African American students (610=44%) which was accurate was also the number reported for students with disabilities (610=44%) which was not accurate. The number for students with disabilities is under 200/less than 20%. I'm not sure how that happened or what it did to the calculations for our report card. I just know it is not accurate. On the bright side, it seems that every other district in our area or maybe across the state, had the same mistake in reporting.

The state allows us to also publish a District Profile to highlight accomplishments and areas in which the district is not graded. Almost all districts produce a profile and link it at ODE and on their websites. Here is the link to our profile.

<http://www.finneytown.org/media/about/FLSD%20Profile%20digital%202018.pdf>

Please take time to look at the Strategic Plan, Report Card, and the District Profile. We welcome feedback; contact teachers, the principals, or district staff. We always welcome the chance to partner with you to benefit your students. Together, we are Finneytown!

Respectfully,

Terri Noe

Superintendent