



# On Track to Thrive 2025

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**Grand Island Public Schools  
Strategic Plan • August 2021**



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# Acknowledgements

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On Track to Thrive 2025 is the result of input from internal and external Grand Island Public Schools (GIPS) stakeholders. Ten stakeholder engagement sessions were held to review the draft of the plan with teachers, certified staff, classified staff, parents, students, and community leaders. Thank you for taking time to give your valuable input!

On Track to Thrive 2025 incorporates the work and input of the GIPS community in the recent development of the Strategic Equity Action Plans,

Master Facility Plan, and Long Range Plan for Extracurricular Excellence. In addition, On Track to Thrive 2025 reflects GIPS' plans for intentional use of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds available from the federal government.

GIPS wishes to thank Policy Studies Associates, Inc. for helping to combine these various plans into one strategic, actionable plan—On Track to Thrive 2025.



# A Note to the Community

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## Dear Grand Island,

In 2017, Grand Island Public Schools (GIPS) launched a strategic plan that created extraordinary opportunities for students. One of our main mantras was “Better Together.” As we consider the numerous challenges we’ve faced in 2020 and 2021, we know we are better and stronger together.

Through a series of recent stakeholder meetings with students, staff, parents, and community, you shared about your lived experiences and expressed your hopes and dreams for GIPS. We listened to your input and are proud to release our newest strategic plan, *On Track to Thrive 2025*.

Our north star continues to be Every Student, Every Day, A Success! This plan highlights key values of equity and excellence—bolstering even greater commitment of high expectations for all. *On Track to Thrive 2025* takes into account the current realities and opportunities our students and staff are facing, while allowing us to remain relevant as we empower, personalize, design, and partner, to provide the best future possible for our students.

*On Track to Thrive 2025* includes four success areas and GIPS has clearly outlined its commitments and accountability measures. The four student success areas are:

- Every student has access to high-quality, culturally responsive, and engaging learning environments
- Every student will develop literacy skills across disciplines
- Every student is socially and emotionally equipped to thrive in school and in life
- Every student will graduate as a college, career, and community-ready citizen

As we propel this plan forward, we want to emphasize to our community that literacy is a strong component that is woven throughout. We are excited for the ownership that all PK-12 students will take as educators for literacy, acknowledging literacy is liberation.

Our greatest success of being able to serve our students has come through our partnership with our community. As superintendent of schools and the collective board of education, we stand united for Every Student, Every Day, A Success! We invite you to stay engaged and involved. You can continue to expect greatness from GIPS, because we are still growing, still learning, and still thriving.

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## Sincerely,

Dr. Tawana Grover, Superintendent  
Lisa Albers, Ward B  
Carlos Barcenas, Ward C  
Dr. Dan Brosz, Ward A  
Terry Brown, Ward A  
Josh Hawley, Ward C

Bonnie Hinkle, Ward B  
Dave Hulinsky, Ward B  
Lindsey Jurgens, Ward A  
Erika Wolfe, Ward C

# Our Success Equation

## VISION

Students prepared to make positive contributions to society and thrive in an ever-changing world.

## MISSION

Every Student, Every Day, A Success! In educating students, we teach hearts as well as minds.

## VALUES

**Equity:** In GIPS, equity means that each individual receives what they need, when they need it, in an inclusive and anti-discriminatory environment.

**Excellence:** GIPS strives to provide an exceptional educational experience for students across our district. We hold ourselves to the highest standards and work with families and our community to provide students the supports they need to excel.

## PILLARS

Empower  
Personalize  
Design  
Partner

### Students engaged in learning

Every student

- engages in high-quality early learning
- has access to learning models that meet their unique needs
- learns in a safe and resourced environment



### Students empowered through literacy

Every student

- is empowered through literacy
- has equitable access to rigorous, relevant coursework



### Students learning in a culturally responsive environment

Every student

- is provided a personalized environment for learning
- and family are welcome in GIPS schools
- feels a sense of belonging



### Students thriving in school and life

Every student

- engages with educators who reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of GIPS
- is on-track to meet the promise of the GIPS graduate profile



How do we make this happen? Systems change: We seek to disrupt inequities through systems change.

Systems changes are designed to directly advance equitable outcomes for students and families and drive resources, staffing, policy, and/or practices in a way that can be seen and felt by all GIPS stakeholders.

# GIPS Success Area 1

Every student has access to high-quality, culturally responsive, and engaging learning environments

## GIPS OBJECTIVES

1.1

Every student engages in high-quality early learning

1.2

Every student has access to learning models that meet their unique needs

**Why is this important?**  
The Strategic Equity Action Plan (SEA Plan) identified a disparity in chronic absenteeism. In 2020-21, 60% of Black or African American and 64% of Hispanic students were chronically absent in 10th-12th grade, compared to 39% of their peers.

## GIPS COMMITS TO

Expanded pre-K classrooms, including through partnerships

Broadened pre-K eligibility criteria

Communication with all families—especially English Learner and migrant families—about the early learning opportunities in GIPS (access, benefits, and curriculum)

Supportive attendance policy that connects families and students to resources that remove barriers to attendance

Flexible and multi-modal learning options, such as:

- Virtual learning classrooms
- Flexible high school schedule
- Night Owl Academy
- Summer learning

Extended school transportation hours to encourage participation in expanded learning opportunities

Extracurricular excellence plan that centers youth voice and choice

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## GIPS OBJECTIVES

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1.3

Every student learns in a safe and resourced environment

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## GIPS COMMITS TO

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Facilities master plan that addresses safety and modernized learning environments for all students

Equitable, transparent distribution of human capital resources and funds at district, building, and classroom levels to meet the needs of every student

Differentiated staffing and supports for schools, principals, and teachers based on school needs and equity formulas

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# Success Measures

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## School ratings increase

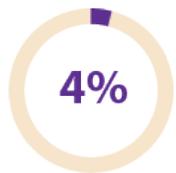
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By 2024-25, 75% or more of students will rate their school highly on the Panorama Climate survey.

## Reduced absenteeism

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By 2024-25, GIPS will meet or exceed the Nebraska Department of Education chronic absenteeism target of 4%, reducing chronic absenteeism at upper grade levels, with no disparities by race/ethnicity.



# GIPS Success Area 2

Every student will develop literacy skills across disciplines

## GIPS OBJECTIVES

2.1

Every student is empowered through literacy

**Why is this important?**  
The SEA Plan identified a disparity in student achievement by race/ethnicity. In 2020-21, 31% of Hispanic students in kindergarten or first grade reached the DIBELS benchmark compared to 54% of their peers. Also, in 2020-21, 38% of Hispanic students in grades 2-10 reached proficiency, compared to 58% of their peers.

## GIPS COMMITS TO

Every PK-5th grade student will develop the foundational skills, build knowledge and academic vocabulary essential for learning across disciplines

Every 6-12th grade student will improve literacy skills across disciplines so that they thrive in college, career, and community

Develop a PK-12 Literacy Coalition to analyze current data and provide feedback on practices that align to current research



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## GIPS OBJECTIVES

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2.2

Every student has equitable access to rigorous, relevant coursework

### Why is this important?

The SEA Plan identified a disparity in access to the Gifted & Talented program by race/ethnicity. In 2020-21, 20% of Gifted & Talented students in grades 4-12 were Hispanic, but 53% of the GIPS student population in grades 4-12 were Hispanic.

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## GIPS COMMITS TO

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Implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) that addresses the unique academic strengths and needs of every student through:

- Implementation of Professional Learning Communities that focus on improving student results and disrupting educational disparities
- Intentional professional learning aligned to Tier I across high-quality rigorous instruction, resources and programming, and teacher content knowledge aligned to standards
- Targeted interventions
- Personalized Learning Plans
- Academic coaching to build capacity of educators to equitably identify and engage all students, including through personalized programming needs (e.g., Gifted & Talented, English Learner, Special Education)

Implementation of standards-based learning through:

- Guaranteed and viable curriculum
- Adoption and implementation of high-quality instructional materials aligned to grade-level standards
- Equitable and consistent grading policies and practices

# Success Measures

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## Equity and excellence

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20%  
MORE

By 2024-25, due to improved literacy skills, 20% more students will be on track as measured by DIBELS, MAP/NSCAS Growth Reading, and ACT-Reading across grade levels, with no disparities by race/ethnicity and English Learner status.



# GIPS Success Area 3

Every student is socially and emotionally equipped to thrive in school and in life

## GIPS OBJECTIVES



Every student is provided a personalized environment for learning

**Why is this important?**  
The SEA Plan identified disparities related to in-school and out-of-school suspensions by disability status. In 2020-21, students with IEPs were suspended at 1.5 times the rate of students without IEPs.

## GIPS COMMITS TO

### Implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

- Positive Support practices are in place in all learning environments, including:
  - Clear expectations, procedures, and routines
  - System for teaching expected behavior
  - System for encouraging expected behavior
  - Common response to minor (classroom-managed) unexpected/inappropriate behavior
  - Function-based interventions for the unique social-emotional strengths and needs of every student

### Shift from a punitive discipline system to a focus on preventative/proactive strategies for classroom management

- Implementation of Positive Supports Framework
- Teachers are trained on trauma-informed and restorative classroom strategies

### Staffing structures that support social-emotional learning (SEL)

- School counselors and/or social workers at every school allocated through equity formulas to meet each school's SEL plan
- Supports for the social-emotional well-being of GIPS staff
- Training for all educators on integrating Positive Supports and SEL practices

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## GIPS OBJECTIVES

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3.2

Every student and family is welcomed in GIPS schools

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## GIPS COMMITS TO

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(3.1 continued)  
Ensuring that every student is connected to a supportive adult

Community partnerships that increase supports to students and families

- Mental health services available at all buildings
- Wraparound services/community partnerships for students in need of Tier 3 support.

GIPS family engagement plan that is comprehensive, culturally responsive, and multilingual

Protocols to support community school practices across district schools

Culturally responsive training to build capacity of all GIPS staff to engage with students and families with varying linguistic, cultural, and ability backgrounds

- Enhanced onboarding programs emphasizing cultural awareness
- Ongoing training and coaching on inclusive, culturally responsive pedagogy

# Success Measures

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## Improved SEL

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By 2024-25, students will report a 15% increase in their social-emotional development from the Spring 2020-21 Panorama SEL survey, with no disparities by race/ethnicity and gender across levels.

## Reduced suspensions

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By 2024-25, suspensions will be reduced 30% from 2020-21 rates, with no disparities by race/ethnicity, gender, and disability status.

# GIPS Success Area 4

Every student will graduate college, career, and community-ready

## GIPS OBJECTIVES

4.1

Every student engages with educators who reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of GIPS

**Why is this important?**  
The SEA Plan identified a disparity in the diversity of staff relative to the student body. Since 2019, the Persons of Color (PoC) representation has nearly tripled to almost 15% of all certified staff. This increased diversity still does not reflect the student body, which is 59% PoC.

4.2

Every student is on-track to meet the promise of the GIPS graduate profile

## GIPS COMMITS TO

The GIPS Equity Office will promote anti-racist and equitable policies and practices

Creating a diverse pipeline for educators and administrators, including through:

- University partnerships
- Future teacher pathway in the Academies of Grand Island Senior High School (GISH)
- ASCEND principal pipeline

Human Resources strategies to recruit and hire culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse staff, educators, and administrators

- Conduct comprehensive compensation and benefits review; take appropriate actions toward equitable compensation
- Identification of biases that impact human capital decisions

Instill high expectations for all students, including addressing any classroom-level implicit biases

Access to college and career curriculum for every student, beginning in elementary school

College and Career Achievement Centers at all middle schools and GISH

- Individualized counseling to develop postsecondary plans
- Access to daily on-site college and workforce advising

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## GIPS OBJECTIVES

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**Why is this important?**  
The annual dropout rate in GIPS has historically been 2% for all students. The SEA Plan identified a disparity within the dropout rate by race/ethnicity. In 2019-20, 57% of dropouts were Hispanic males, over two times their proportion of 26% among high school students.

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## GIPS COMMITS TO

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(4.2, continued)  
**Opportunities for students to engage with institutions of higher education throughout their high school experience**

**Access to work-based learning opportunities and diverse leaders**

- Partnerships with the Grand Island business community
- Registered apprenticeship programs

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# Success Measures

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## Close the graduation gap

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By 2024-25, 90% of students will graduate from GIPS and close the disparities in graduation rate by race/ethnicity and gender, including for Hispanic males.

## Meet graduation criteria

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By 2024-25, 20% more GIPS students will meet college, career, and community-ready criteria by graduation, with no disparities by race/ethnicity and gender.



# Seeing Success

OUR CORE VALUES  
**EQUITY + EXCELLENCE**

Every student has access to high-quality, culturally responsive, and engaging learning environments



75% or more of students at each school will rate their school highly on school climate

Chronic absenteeism will be reduced to meet or exceed Nebraska Department of Education target of 4%

Every student will develop literacy skills across disciplines



20% more students will be on track in literacy

Every student is socially and emotionally equipped to thrive in school and in life



Students will report a 15% increase in their social-emotional development

Suspensions will be reduced by 30%

Every student will graduate college, career, and community-ready



90% of students will graduate from GIPS

20% more GIPS students will meet college, career, and community-ready criteria by graduation

\* By 2024-25 and disaggregated by student group.

*Students who thrive.*



EMPOWER



PERSONALIZE



DESIGN



PARTNER

# Our Pillars

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## Empower

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EMPOWER all staff to advance excellence and equity. We support all staff in implementing high-quality, equitable practices; creating inclusive environments; and providing resources that enable every student to learn and succeed.



## Design

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DESIGN decisions that center excellence and equity. Data and community voice inform decisions about resources, policies, and structures so that each GIPS student and educator thrives.



## Personalize

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PERSONALIZE rigorous and relevant learning for every student and engage student voice in the decision-making process. Learning should provide experiences that ignite the unique interests and passions of our students. Every student is connected with the targeted supports they need to realize their talents and goals.



## Partner

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PARTNER to support the whole child. The strengths and assets of our families and community are critical to our success. We will work hand in hand, inside and outside of school hours, to advance every student's well-being and success.



# Next Steps

GIPS will operationalize this strategic plan into departmental action plans and updated school improvement plans in late summer/early fall 2021. These plans will include annual success benchmarks; key levers and actions; persons responsible; timelines; and key resource investments. The district will facilitate cross-departmental planning, in consultation with community stakeholders, to ensure collective efforts are aligned. GIPS commits to annual public reports of progress toward strategic objectives and success measures.

Additionally, GIPS commits to completing and

making public four districtwide plans already in process that undergird the strategic plan:

- Master facilities plan
- Extracurricular excellence plan
- Strategic Equity Action (SEA) plans
- ESSER budget plan for use of federal funds

Through these aligned planning efforts, GIPS will ensure the strategic plan is operationalized, with resources expended efficiently and effectively, so that every student in GIPS is positioned to thrive—Every Student, Every Day, A Success!



# Glossary

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**Chronic Absenteeism** - Defined as students absent 10% or more days during the school year.

**Cultural Responsive** - According to NDE's Equity and Diversity section of the Continuous Improvement Process (CIP) toolkit, culturally responsive refers to “behaviors that facilitate the achievement of all students. In a culturally responsive classroom, teaching and learning occur in a supportive environment in which teachers identify, nurture, and use students’ personal and cultural strengths to promote their achievement (Equity Alliance, Arizona State University).”

**Disrupt** - To achieve systems change may mean to discontinue practices that have been common for many years and to create new practices. It may involve researching and showing how policies, behaviors, and practices may have prevented specific students or groups of students from advancing to find their full potential. Stopping these policies, behaviors, and practices can be powerful and yet not always appreciated at first. The term disrupt is a powerful verb describing how change is initiated because it is necessary to bring equity to the forefront for all students.

**Equity levers** - In order to create a setting where equity can be fostered and maintained takes initial changes to whatever prevented or stood in the way of equity. These “initial changes” that lead to a sustainable force for change can be considered as equity levers. An example of an equity lever might be for the district to provide a specific training to all teachers before requiring them to demonstrate a new equity-related standard in their teaching practice.

**Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum** - The purpose of a guaranteed and viable curriculum is to ensure that all students in all schools and grade levels

across the district learn the same core content at a specific instructional level. A guaranteed and viable curriculum consists of standards that fully outline the content, concepts, and skills that are essential within an academic discipline and at each grade level to ensure all students have the opportunity to achieve proficiency. The guaranteed curriculum provides clarity and guidance for stakeholders and ensures that all students learn essential content and skills from a high-quality instructional resource. Viability means the distinctly articulated content and skills can be taught and learned within available and protected timeframes during the academic year.

**Intervention** - An intervention includes instruction and strategies (e.g., increased feedback, increased structure) that are intentionally planned and carefully selected based upon data. Interventions are typically sustained over the course of several weeks, provided a set number of days/week, and for a specific amount of time. Intervention progress is consistently measured based upon level of need with the goal that students will achieve academic or social success without the need for continued intervention.

**Literacy** - Literacy is engaging in reading, writing, listening, and speaking across all disciplines to comprehend, analyze, reason, and communicate within an ever-changing world. #LiteracyisLiberation

**Multi-modal Learning** - Strategies to improve the quality of teaching by matching content delivery with the best mode of learning for the student.

**Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS)** - A comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision making.

**Positive Supports (PS)** - An evidence-based, three-tiered framework to improve and integrate all of the data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes every day. Shared leadership teams help create systems for the following: clarifying expectations, encouraging expected behavior, discouraging inappropriate behavior, active supervision, and referral systems (including use of a Major/Minor Flowchart and documentation guidelines).

**Positive Supports Framework** - This GIPS Framework provides an organizational approach for improving the social and emotional climate of schools and enhancing the impact of academic instruction on achievement and increasing proactive preventive supports for learning.

**Restorative Practices** - Restorative practices promote inclusiveness, relationship-building, and problem-solving, through such restorative methods as circles for teaching and conflict resolution to conferences that bring victims, offenders, and their supporters together to address wrongdoing. Instead of punishment, students are encouraged to reflect on and take responsibility for their actions and come up with plans to repair harm.

**Social Emotional Learning (SEL)** - SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

**Suspensions** - For On Track to Thrive 2025, the measurement of suspensions refers to students who receive in school or out-of-school suspension.

**Systems Change** - Systems change involves creating a complete new way of doing things so that on all applicable levels of an organization, the change can be seen. Peter Senge, a leader of systems change, wrote of systems change in *The Fifth Discipline* (2006) saying that “We will never transform the prevailing system of management without transforming our prevailing system of education. They are the same system.”

**Tier 1** - Universal Instruction (Tier 1) is what “all” students receive in the form of academic and positive behavior support. The universal tier is comprised of the strong implementation of the district’s standards-aligned core curriculum, instruction, assessment and the collaborative work schools do to use time effectively to engage all students in learning a common set of skills and knowledge needed. A strong Universal Tier is defined as having 80% or more of students meeting expectations without requiring intervention support beyond the Universal Tier.

**Tier 2** - Targeted Interventions (Tier 2) are for some students who require additional academic or behavioral support. Targeted interventions are planned, carefully considered interventions when students do not meet academic or social expectations that are necessary for academic and social success. Targeted interventions that are implemented consistently, as intended, by typical school personnel are likely to demonstrate positive effects for up to 67%-75% of referred students.

**Tier 3** - Intensive interventions (Tier 3) help students with persistent learning and behavioral needs. Intensive intervention is considered the most intense level of intervention. Providing intensive interventions is a process, not a specific program or product. The process is driven by data, characterized by increased intensity and individualization, and considers the academic and social needs of the student.

**Trauma Informed Practices** - In a trauma-informed school, the adults in the school community are prepared to recognize and respond to those who have been impacted by traumatic stress. Those adults include administrators, teachers, staff, and parents. In addition, students are provided with clear expectations and communication strategies to guide them through stressful situations.

**Wraparound Services** - The Wraparound process provides community-based services and supports that “wrap around” a child or youth and their family in their home, school, and community in an effort to help meet their needs.

# On Track to Thrive 2025

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## Advancing with Ownership

*In implementing this strategic plan, we realize that changes must occur at all levels. We are committed to hearing multiple voices and perspectives, having crucial conversations, and aligning resources to our priorities. We will continue to deliver support for our staff, students, and community.*