

**SPPS State of the District**  
**Dr. Joe Gothard, Superintendent, Saint Paul Public Schools**

Thank you Chair Ellis, and good morning everyone

It's a privilege to be here today to present the SPPS State of the District

But before I begin my brief remarks, I also want to recognize members of the Saint Paul Public Schools Board of Education who are here today

Thank you for your public service and for your passionate dedication to our students

Board Members, educators, staff, elected officials, partners, community members and students – The State of the District is Good, and our Strategic Plan, *SPPS Achieves*, will make it even better

At its core, this plan is rooted in six long-term student outcomes:

- Decrease disparities in achievement based on race, ethnicity, culture and identity
- Increase achievement of English Learners
- Increase achievement of student receiving special education services
- Improve kindergarten readiness, and
- Prepare all graduates for career, college and life

Let me be clear: These are long term outcomes. These are not quick fixes; they are not a flavor of the month. These are key areas of achievement we want to and will improve in order to raise the performance of all students

There are a number of things we need to do as a district to bring about these positive changes in student achievement

And it starts with culture

We need to create a shared sense of community to build trust within and outside of our schools

That means creating school cultures that are inclusive; where students are supported to show up as their full selves and thrive as learners

Can you imagine classrooms and schools that are friendly and welcoming and where students can be their authentic selves, AND where staff members are supported to thrive and deliver exceptional student outcomes

That's an integral part of *SPPS Achieves*

Our improvement will come as we engage with stakeholders to define what positive culture means for SPPS

That means doing surveys and conducting focus groups and actually LISTENING to students, staff and families as we identify ways to improve school and district culture

Going forward we are committed to expanding opportunities for our students to have a voice, and we will recruit and retain more employees who look like our students

At this time, we're going to hear from a couple of students

First, Chee Vang is a senior here at Washington – having been here since 7<sup>th</sup> grade

- Prior to that Chee attended grades 5 and 6 at St. Paul Music Academy

Also speaking will be Sherry Xiong, who is also a senior here at Washington.

- Sherry has been her since 7<sup>th</sup> grade after attending Barack and Michelle Obama Elementary for all of elementary school

Please join me in welcoming Chee Vang and Sherry Xiong

(Students speak)

Thank you Chee and thank you Sherry

A major focus of *SPPS Achieves* is the college and career paths of our students

That means increasing opportunities for students to envision their future, explore careers and prepare for college

One way to do that is to create career-related curriculum

Too often we as adults, either as parents, family members or as educators hear students tell us, “Why do I need to know this, or why should I take this class – I’m never going to use this anyway.”

Our goal is to eliminate these questions and help ensure students are truly connected to their classes and their instruction

SPPS Achieves calls for Saint Paul Public Schools to establish a process where all students, Pre K through high school, can create and regularly update their own personal learning plan that integrates their strengths, interests and goals for the future

We’re excited to build on our college and career pathway work that’s already taking place

SPPS has customized lists of classes for students interested in a number of fields of study including Health Sciences, Aviation, Human Services, Business, Agriculture, Arts, Communications, Technology and Engineering

Many of these opportunities involve partnerships with employers, community partners and colleges

A number of those community partners are here today, and on behalf of the entire district, I offer my sincere thanks for your work and your collaboration

Of course our successful college and career pathway efforts wouldn't be possible without the innovation and passion of our amazing educators

Our principals, teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff members provide strong education and rigorous courses

One of those innovative educators is right here at Washington

She spent 8 years as a social studies teacher in our District, and for the last 8 years has been curriculum coordinator in this building

Please join me in welcoming Michelle Leba

(Michelle speaks)

Thank you Michelle

Michelle is part of a great team here at Washington; and it takes a great leader who supports this kind of innovation

I want to give special recognition to Dr. Mike McCollor, who you met earlier. Mike has served in our District since 1985, and has principal here since 2002

And recently, Mike was named Minnesota High School Principal of the Year by the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals

Mike, on behalf of all of us, congratulations for this deserving recognition; and thank you for your leadership and your support of the innovation of your team

One of the great things about our principals like Mike, other leaders in our District really all of us in SPPS is our openness to and appreciation of our community partnerships

We owe a great deal of thanks to our business and community partners who support SPPS

The work you have enabled has demonstrated the achievement outcomes we want to see more of

Career Pathways provide students career-focused, hands-on opportunities that lead directly to certification, employment, and/or college

The Greater Twin Cities United Way has supported Career Pathways in Construction and Welding and is expanding to Medical and Environmental Pathways

Travelers Foundation helped to found and continues to support the Academy of Finance

3M has been a partner of SPPS supporting STEM and Career and Technical Education for longer than anyone on my staff can remember

Best Buy Foundation also supports our Academy of Information Technology and the student Genius Squad.

Over a million dollars each year directly benefits St. Paul students through the generosity of our community partners

The financial support has been huge for us and I hope each of you can see the outcomes of your investments in *SPPS Achieves*

But I have an even greater and more important request than your generous financial support today (but don't stop that either!)

For the strategic plan to succeed, I need each of you business leaders - large ones and small ones - to open your doors to our students. They need exposure to, and experience in, the world of work

I also need your guidance and leadership on what we do in the classroom to prepare students for that work

I have invested in a Work-Based Learning Coordinator at each comprehensive high school next year. These teachers have a unique role in the success of our students: to find work experiences in the community and to prepare students to work in the community

The Work Based Learning Coordinators will call you next year seeking job shadowing experiences, classroom speakers, internships, mentors, and other opportunities

Take their call, or better yet, give me your card today to share with them

Let me tell you a story of successful partnership

I can't tell you the name of the company because the students worked on a proprietary project

This company hired over 20 students and student interns to work on small teams to find possible solutions for a common health challenge

Each team of interns used the human-centered design approach where the process begins with the people you're designing for

Each team was led by a senior director who provided support for the student interns throughout the process

Students interviewed employees, observed people in their work, documented their findings, and researched possible solutions

Then they worked with a research and development mentor who helped the students design a tool and build a prototype

Finally, the students presented their work and prototypes to the research and development team and marketing department. The work our 21st Century learners did was so impressive that the company just shared they will be hiring SPPS student interns again for summer 2019

This is the kind of successful partnership that is at the core of *SPPS Achieves*

It's important to hear from one of our partners and understand the achievement that occurs benefits both the students, AND the business

As Michelle mentioned, the University of Minnesota is a key partner of ours with the College in Schools program

But they also offer much more

Please join me in welcoming Dr. Karla Stone; she's the co-coordinator of the Exploring the Teaching Profession Course at the University of Minnesota

Dr. Stone:

(Dr. Karla Stone speaks)

Thank you Dr. Stone. We sincerely appreciate the many partnerships we have with the University of Minnesota

And when you look at *SPPS Achieves*, partnerships play an important role

At the heart of our strategic plan is student achievement, one of our key partnerships is the Minnesota Department of Education

Our District participates in the state of Minnesota Achievement and Integration (AI) program. Our Achievement and Integration Plan and progress report is available on the District's website, [spps.org](http://spps.org)

The plan includes:

- supporting families as they navigate our school choice process
- increasing student achievement while reducing racial disparities, and finally,
- creating equitable educational opportunities.

Moving forward, our *SPPS Achieves* strategic plan will guide the development of future Achievement and Integration alignment

Our Strategic Plan also addresses the goals of the states "World's Best Workforce" legislation

The "Striving for the World's Best Workforce" bill was passed in 2013 to ensure every school district in the state is making strides to increase student performance in five goal areas which have been included in our Strategic Plan

You may have noticed this lapel pin I'm wearing

It says "*SPPS Achieves*", and includes the phrases "Each Student", "One Community", "Endless Opportunities"

That's our mantra – that's what we believe in – and that's what is reflected in our strategic plan

*SPPS Achieves* relies on all of us; our schools, our staff, neighborhoods and communities all play an important part in student success at every age  
And we're asking – no – we're counting on you – to take an active role in making this plan come alive in in our schools and our community

You are a part of Saint Paul Public Schools

And in recognition of your partnership, staff members are now distributing these pins to everyone in attendance

I encourage you to wear these with pride; as we embark together on improving long-term student outcomes

Each Student. One Community. Endless Opportunities. These are not simply catch-phrases

These represent our commitment, our passion and yes, our future

Each of us in SPPS, no matter our title, our building or our tenure has important work to do – together – to create inclusive school cultures, to close achievement gaps, to engage with families and our community and ultimately to help prepare students for college, career and life

I want to thank my more than 6-thousand colleagues in SPPS who make our mission and our strategic plan come alive every day in all they do

I also want to issue a challenge:

- This document, SPPS Achieves, is our roadmap; but its potential rests in each one of us
- Our educators, our leaders, our staff, our partners, our families and our community
- Everyone in this room – and everyone in this city has a choice: put effort into this plan – or sit on the sidelines
- We can spectate – or we can participate
- We can watch – or we can work
- The late, great Vince Lombardi once said: “The only place success comes before work – is in the dictionary”

- Join us as we work for all students in Saint Paul Public Schools

We close this morning with a performance by students at the Saint Paul Music Academy

Thank you for being here, and thank you for your efforts on behalf of all our students