



STRATEGIC
PLAN
2026-2028

Vision & Mission

VISION

Expanded access to public magnet and theme-based school options that bring together students from different neighborhoods and backgrounds, promote innovation, and prepare students for success.

MISSION

To serve as the national leader in promoting and expanding high-quality magnet and theme-based public school options through advancing policy, community building, and system supports.

Purpose & Standards

Magnet Schools: Expanding Opportunity through Public School Choice

The original form of public school choice, magnet schools are tuition-free public schools that offer **specialized or career-themed programs** such as:

- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM);
- Fine and Performing Arts;
- International Baccalaureate and International Studies;
- Career and Technical Education; and
- World Languages (immersion and non-immersion).

Magnet schools attract students from across a district or region, giving students from different neighborhoods and backgrounds opportunities to learn together.

Due to high demand, student acceptance is often determined by a lottery at the school or district level.

Magnet Schools of America: Advancing Magnet Education

Magnet Schools of America (MSA) was founded in 1986. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit headquartered in Washington, D.C., the association represents more than 4,300 magnet schools across the nation that educate 3.5 million students. MSA is a resource to magnet schools, teachers, administrators, school boards, families, business leaders, community organizations, and institutions of higher education. Specifically, MSA supports members and the broader education field by:

- (1) **Convening** magnet educators and partners to promote best practices, share promising educational and operational strategies, and help one another solve problems.
- (2) **Delivering** technical assistance and offering professional learning programs related to building leadership capacity, creating collaborative and integrated teaching units, implementing design thinking, and creating diverse and dynamic learning spaces.
- (3) **Recognizing** exemplary magnet schools through national awards, as well as a certification program grounded in a rigorous, evidence-based review process.
- (4) **Advocating** for policies that promote effective magnet schools.
- (5) **Disseminating** high-quality research on magnet programs.



Pillars of Magnet Schools

To help ensure a strong foundation for magnet schools, MSA has identified five pillars that support student success: academic excellence, family and community partnerships, diversity, innovative curriculum and professional development, and leadership. The synergistic relationship of these five equally held tenets is not merely a foundation, but a compass that guides students toward a well-prepared future.



Diversity is achieved through marketing and recruitment strategies as schools attract student populations that reflect their communities. School choice supports educational environments that model empathy, respect, collaboration, and inclusion of all cultures.



Innovative Curriculum and Professional Development promote academic achievement and are often tied to a school's theme. Effective teaching strategies are grounded in research-based best practices, while curricula align with high-quality, rigorous standards that prepare students for higher education and career success.



Academic Excellence is demonstrated through a commitment to multi-dimensional instruction focused on student needs. Multiple assessment strategies are employed to monitor student learning, progress, and success. High expectations are clearly articulated, and personalized supports address the interests and aspirations of all students.



Family and Community Partnerships offer a system of support, shared ownership, and a caring spirit. Partnerships with families are essential for a rich educational experience for students. Community partnerships, meanwhile, include a wide range of stakeholders from business, health and human services, and other fields to support the theme-integrated educational environment and give students a real-world view of future pathways.



Leadership at the school and district levels is demonstrated through a commitment to continuous improvement and monitoring by administrators for effective magnet school organization and systems. Decisions about hiring, budgets, training, and career pathways are collaborative and focus on sustaining high-quality instructional systems.

Strategic Planning Process



In 2024, MSA engaged a professional consulting firm to facilitate a research-backed, consensus-based strategic planning process with the MSA board of directors, staff, and membership. Between October 2024 and February 2025, the firm led a series of planning sessions. Following those meetings, the board engaged in additional discussions as a full governing body and in separate work groups.

The planning process involved:

- An **internal assessment** to identify strengths, challenges, opportunities, and barriers as well as related priorities for the strategic planning process.
- A **practical vision** of what MSA seeks to accomplish in the next three years as a result of its actions.
- A set of strategic directions, or **broad strategies**, to achieve **specific goals**.
- An **implementation plan** to support ongoing accountability and realization of the goals.

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Strategic Directions

Strategic Direction 1: Building a Community of Support for Magnet Schools

Through the strategic planning process, the board determined that MSA has built a strong foundation by convening magnet educators and leaders through national conferences and professional learning opportunities, by recognizing excellence through nationally respected awards and certification programs, and by strengthening its role as a national advocate for magnet schools and the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program.

The board further determined that the next level of impact will require scalable community engagement tools, more intentional partnership frameworks, continued investment in coalition-building and family engagement, and clear, unified messaging in an increasingly complex political environment. As such, MSA will:

- **Facilitate networking and peer-to-peer learning among magnet school educators and leaders**
 - Convene approximately 1,500 educators through MSA's national conference
 - Expand networks and learning through sessions, cross-district collaboration, practitioner-led learning, and peer-to-peer connections
- **Showcase best practices and successful magnet school models**
 - Harness communications platforms to amplify practitioner voices as well as proven or promising programs
 - Highlight exemplars through national awards and certification programs
- **Develop resources and toolkits that support community engagement and advocacy**
 - Produce toolkits to support family engagement, enrollment and lottery transparency, and community-facing messaging
 - Assist districts interested in expanding or reintroducing magnet programs

Strategic Direction 1: Building a Community of Support for Magnet Schools (cont'd.)

- **Foster partnerships** with businesses, higher education institutions, and community organizations
 - Analyze connections between magnet themes and pathways that lead to higher education and the workforce
 - Systematically codify partnerships with business, higher education, and community organizations across the network
- **Lead through a unified identity** that honors the mission, vision, and magnet pillars
 - Advance a clear and consistent national narrative about the value of magnet schools
 - Advocate for the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program



Strategic Direction 2: Investing in Student Success Through Educator Empowerment

Through the strategic planning process, the board determined that MSA plays an increasingly important role in highlighting the innovative instructional practices and commitment to educator excellence found in magnet schools. The next level of impact will require shifting from sharing best practices to demonstrating measurable impact and building a cohesive educator pipeline strategy. It will also require elevating the voice and expertise of educators, more explicitly linking high-quality magnet school programs to student performance data, and equipping schools with practical tools that support continuous improvement and day-to-day decision-making. As such, MSA will:

- **Offer high-quality, relevant professional development** for magnet school educators and leaders
 - Enhance services offered through the National Institute for Magnet School Leadership (NIMSL)
 - Expand access to certification pathways and leadership development opportunities
 - Increase participation in professional learning experiences designed specifically for magnet educators and leaders, and develop a system to scale these supports
 - Expand field-based knowledge sharing through conference sessions, practitioner experiences, and other opportunities to learn through peer learning environments and networks
- **Promote innovative instructional strategies** and curriculum development
 - Identify, elevate, and showcase exemplary magnet programs and instructional models
 - Recognize nationally certified magnet schools, reinforcing implementation fidelity and program quality
 - Bestow Merit Awards grounded in quality indicators that highlight best practices related to: (1) instructional innovation, (2) theme integration, and (3) student achievement outcomes

Strategic Direction 2: Investing in Student Success Through Educator Empowerment (cont'd.)

- **Support the magnet educator and leader pipeline**
 - Develop pathways that prepare and support future magnet school leaders
 - Explore new certification and credentialing opportunities for educators
 - Increase opportunities for educators to serve as presenters, mentors, and thought leaders within the magnet school community
- **Empower teachers and leaders** as advocates for student success
 - Expand opportunities for educators to share their expertise and experiences
 - Elevate practitioner voices through conferences, communications platforms, and professional networks
 - Strengthen educator engagement in advancing magnet education at the local, state, and national levels
- **Utilize and create research** to support high-quality teaching, learning, and student outcomes
 - Increase access to data, research, and evidence-based practices that support continuous improvement
 - Establish research priorities that advance understanding of magnet schools and their impact on academic achievement, college and career readiness, and other student outcomes

Strategic Direction 3: Strengthening Governance and Operational Capacity

Through the strategic planning process, the board determined that MSA is at a pivotal organizational moment. The association's national influence is expanding at a time of rising complexity across the policy and education landscape. The board further determined that MSA's long-term success will depend upon strong governance and organizational capacity, effective internal systems that meet external demand, robust data infrastructure and performance metrics, and financial stability through diversified funding streams. As such, MSA will:

- **Enhance organizational structures** and leadership pathways for sustainability
 - Clarify roles and responsibilities
 - Ensure governance structures support organizational health and long-term sustainability
 - Deliver unified messaging across communications platforms to elevate MSA's national identity and value proposition
 - Build coordinated advocacy infrastructure
 - Proactively prepare for rapid-response communications needs by compiling and disseminating magnet-specific performance metrics
- **Implement data-driven decision-making processes** for performance improvement
 - Build magnet-specific data systems
 - Track metrics as a means for continued learning and improvement
 - Commission and/or promote research on the links between magnet programs and student outcomes
- **Optimize MSA's financial stability** through diverse and sustainable funding streams for magnet initiatives
 - Strengthen relationships with foundations, corporate partners, and individual donors
 - Diversify revenue sources through grants, sponsorships, membership dues, event registration fees, and earned income from professional learning and certification programs



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