

# ACPS 2020: A stakeholder-driven strategic plan process

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In July of 2014, the Alexandria City School Board embarked on a stakeholder-driven strategic plan process to set the goals for the Alexandria City Public Schools for the next five years. By choosing to engage in a process that draws from the best ideas of the community, the Board will ensure that ACPS is a high-performing school division and meets the expectations of the community. The first steps in the process were to identify the Board's Mission and Vision (found on page two) and then to appoint a Stakeholder Committee to represent the diverse mosaic that makes up Alexandria. Members of the Committee are listed on the Strategic Plan website, [www.acps.k12.va.us/board/strategic-plan/](http://www.acps.k12.va.us/board/strategic-plan/).

The Stakeholder Committee has been meeting since October and has benefited from an "External Scan" of the international, national, state, and local trends and ideas in education today. The External Scan is available on the website. The Committee also conducted a survey to gather ideas from the community. The survey results are also on the website. After months of deliberations and reviews, the Committee has arrived at some very tentative conclusions about the goals that it wants to include in the new long-range plan for ACPS. It now wants to hear from the community about areas that people think should be strengthened or changed or added. On the following pages, members of the Alexandria community can review those ideas and can comment on the website or at a series of forums that the Committee is hosting.

The Committee has proposed six goal areas all leading to student achievement that can be represented as follows:



## **Mission\***

*Every student succeeds: Educating lifelong learners and inspiring civic responsibility.*

## **Vision\***

*Our students achieve at high levels, are well-rounded, critical thinkers, and have a passion to learn.*

*ACPS has an engaging and collaborative climate that promotes ethical behavior and values diversity.*

*ACPS is a vital part of the fabric of our community, and Alexandria residents and businesses take pride in our schools.*

## **Goals**

*Academic Excellence and Educational Equity:*

**Every child will be academically successful and career-ready.**

*Family and Community Engagement:*

**ACPS will partner with families and the community in the education of Alexandria's youth.**

*A Superior Staff:*

**ACPS will recruit, develop, support, and retain a superior staff.**

*Facilities and the Learning Environment:*

**ACPS will provide optimal and equitable learning environments.**

*Health and Wellness:*

**ACPS will provide access and support that enables students to be physically, emotionally, and socially healthy and ready to learn.**

*Accountability:*

**ACPS will be responsive, efficient, effective, and accountable to students, families, and the community.**

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\* Adopted by consensus of the Alexandria City School Board, July 10, 2014.

## Academic Excellence and Educational Equity: Every child will be academically successful and career-ready.

*Why this is important: The preparation of students for post-secondary life is a fundamental purpose of K-12 education. By pledging that the education provided by ACPS be done in an atmosphere of excellence, we ensure that students will be challenged to stretch their talents and aspirations and to raise their own expectations. Educational equity is a core requirement if our society is to stay true to its promise and derive the greatest contributions from all of its members. Although educational equity does not mean that all students will have the same experiences or the same results, it does mean that the education provided by ACPS will respond to each student's individual challenges, interests, and abilities.*

### Potential Objectives – For Discussion Purposes

#### 1.1 Educational Excellence

*All students graduate ready for college and career with global competencies for the 21st Century.*

ACPS will respond to the needs, interests, and abilities of individual students by:

- collaborating with the student and his/her family in creating differentiated support.
- fostering student “ownership” of his/her own learning goals.
- ensuring that there is equitable access to and reinforcing support for a curriculum aligned to Virginia State Standards and such 21st Century Skills as collaboration and communication, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the ACPS approach to 21st Century Skills, see [www.acps.k12.va.us/curriculum/design/](http://www.acps.k12.va.us/curriculum/design/). Additional information is available in the [External Scan](#), p.121 et seq.

#### 1.2 Educational Equity

*All students benefit from the opportunities available to them in ACPS.*

ACPS will provide each student the same opportunity to be challenged and receive the same high level of support regardless of his/her background.

#### 1.3 Achievement Gaps

*Learning for students and student groups is accelerated to transcend disparities and ensure positive educational outcomes.*

ACPS will implement evidence-based best practices, strategies, and tactics to:

- eliminate academic achievement differences among race, income, disability, and language subgroups.
- increase representation of minority students in talented and gifted programs.
- decrease suspension rates of minority students, particularly males.
- prevent the over-identification of subgroups for remedial or special education services.

#### 1.4 Cultural Competence and an Atmosphere of Respect

*The richness of cultural, linguistic, racial, and ethnic diversity within the student body is an asset.*

ACPS will cultivate cultural competence and connections among children and youth and those who serve them,<sup>2</sup> and will engage every student across academic levels, cultures, and learning styles. Respectful behavior will be exhibited by all members of the school community.

<sup>2</sup> This objective is taken from the Alexandria Children and Youth Master Plan (ACYMP) [ACYMP Strategy 3.4](#). Other references to the ACYMP will be cited in parentheses at the end of paragraphs in this plan.

### 1.5 Civic Engagement<sup>3</sup> and Ethical Behavior

*All children succeed as citizens in the global community.*

ACPS will foster an atmosphere where students take charge of their own educations and behavior and will be prepared to participate actively in the civic life of their schools and the Alexandria community.

### 1.6 Teacher Resources and Supports

*Teachers are successful in supporting student learning.*

ACPS will make available to each teacher the resources and supports needed to provide an outstanding education for each and every student, differentiated according to the student's learning style and background.

### 1.7 Early Childhood Education

*Children enter school ready to learn and succeed.*

ACPS will partner with the City, nonprofit groups, and community providers to create an integrated and aligned early care and education (ECE) system focused on improved access, quality, and public awareness of ECE services available for children and families. (ACYMP 2.1.1)

### 1.8 Adult Education and Services for Adult English Language Learners

*Life-long learning is a key 21st Century skill, and English fluency is an important component of civic engagement and economic advancement.*

ACPS will expand its adult learning opportunities and collaborate with community organizations to encourage adult English-language learners to take advantage of ACPS offerings.

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<sup>3</sup> Civic engagement is defined as actions wherein individuals participate in activities of personal and public concern that are both individually life enriching and socially beneficial to the community. For additional information on civic engagement, see Harvard Kennedy School's [Social Capital Measurement Overview](#).

## **Family and Community Engagement: ACPS will partner with families and the community in the education of Alexandria's youth.**

*Why this is important: The education of Alexandria's young people is a shared responsibility of families and schools, and by recognizing the important role that families play and by assisting families to understand curricula and ways they can support children, we all benefit. By recognizing the role of the community in its public schools, we can extend the reach of the school division and strengthen the supports we provide to students. By nurturing welcoming environments at school facilities, we can help make schools centers of civic activity and develop pride in school facilities. Community engagement, including outreach to the business community, can expand the number of partnerships that provide services to schools, including tutoring, internships and jobs, and other opportunities for students.*

### **Potential Objectives – For Discussion Purposes**

#### **2.1 Family Engagement**

*Students receive the support they need to succeed.*

ACPS will effectively engage the families of students in their education by:

- providing high-quality, coordinated services for parents and guardians to be leaders in the learning and development of their children. (ACYMP 4.1)
- cooperating in community-wide efforts to support families, children, and youth.

#### **2.2 School Engagement**

*Respectful two-way communication builds trust.*

ACPS will foster at each school and in each classroom a culture of engagement and shared responsibility that promotes communication with families and the community and that provides an inviting, respectful, and culturally responsive atmosphere.

#### **2.3 Community Engagement**

*Crowd-sourcing of ideas helps identify innovative and community-appropriate best practices.*

ACPS will actively engage families, students, staff members, and community members in school programs and activities, division governance, and volunteer opportunities, and will recognize that engagement in public ceremonies and events.

#### **2.4 Partnerships and Civic Engagement**

*Resources are extended and students are supported.*

ACPS will partner with external organizations to extend its services and programs and to encourage a sense of community ownership of our schools and support the development of the academic, social, physical, and emotional needs of students.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This objective is taken from [ACPS 2009 Strategy 1.8](#).

#### **2.5 Media and Public Outreach**

*Support for the schools increases.*

ACPS will reach out in consistent ways to the public and media to ensure that the ACPS voice is heard on issues and in stories to build trust and confidence in the school system and enlist the entire community in support of its mission.

#### **2.6 Collaboration with Social Welfare Agencies and Social Service Organizations**

*Families are supported and students benefit.*

ACPS will collaborate with local and state agencies to support families and provide referrals to social welfare agencies and social service organizations.

## **A Superior Staff: ACPS will recruit, develop, support, and retain a superior staff.**

*Why this is important: Our employees need to be resourceful, flexible, and creative. They must value diversity and collaboration and work well in teams. To this end, we must actively recruit, hire, train, and retain our staff using innovative methods. We must empower our people to be educational leaders. We must be driven by research and a constant adaptation in light of evidence. We must seek to reflect in our workforce the diversity of our community and meet the diverse needs of a multicultural student body. The school district needs to ensure that there are no barriers between the central office and school sites to create an effective flow of services and support. Pockets of excellence—programs and methods proven to work for students—should be shared, replicated, and made systemic.*

### **Potential Objectives – For Discussion Purposes**

#### **3.1 Staff Recruitment and Retention**

*Students receive a high quality education.*

ACPS will hire the best and best-trained professional employees possible and create an environment that motivates, competitively compensates, and retains them.

#### **3.2 Collaborative Instructional Achievement**

*Teacher practices benefit from the experiences of colleagues.*

ACPS will foster a culture within schools in which professionals collaborate closely to share knowledge, skills, and best practices aimed at improving overall school effectiveness and learning outcomes.

#### **3.3 Individual Professional Development Opportunities**

*Teachers are on a continuous cycle of self-identified professional improvement.*

ACPS will provide teachers and staff members with multiple opportunities for improving their individual effectiveness.

#### **3.4 Strategic Priorities Focus**

*Key priorities are implemented.*

ACPS will focus professional learning opportunities on activities that implement the strategic priorities of cultural competence, differentiated instruction, dual-language supports, special education and preparing and implementing Individualized Education Plans, and tailoring activities for students identified as Talented and Gifted.

#### **3.5 Staff Wellness**

*Teachers are in the classroom and students benefit from continuity.*

ACPS will focus on the total fitness and wellbeing of its staff.

## **Facilities and the Learning Environment: ACPS will provide optimal and equitable learning environments.**

*Why this is important: High quality facilities and a robust infrastructure are fundamental to learning and teaching. The physical environment of school buildings and school grounds is a key factor in the overall health and safety of students, staff, and visitors. Student achievement can be affected positively by the physical environment. Safe and clean environments are most conducive to learning and teaching. Inequitable learning environments can impact morale and results. Schools should be a source of pride for students, teachers, and community members.*

### **Potential Objectives – For Discussion Purposes**

#### **4.1 Optimal Learning Environments**

*Student learning is enhanced and teaching is augmented.*

ACPS will move aggressively to modernize learning environments and expand facilities to meet projected capacity needs of the school division.

#### **4.2 Well Maintained Facilities**

*Distractions to learning are reduced and the useful life of facilities is extended.*

ACPS will ensure that facilities are maintained at high levels and that repair needs are addressed in a timely and efficient manner to support the educational mission and daily operations of the district.

#### **4.3 Sustainable Facilities**

*The school division sets an example for students and the community.*

ACPS will model sustainable environmental practices.

#### **4.4 Safe and Secure Facilities**

*Teachers, support staff, and students focus on teaching and learning.*

ACPS will ensure that its facilities are safe and secure.

#### **4.5 Infrastructure**

*Teachers and students have the resources they need.*

ACPS will maintain an infrastructure supportive of the educational program.

#### **4.6 Outdoor Learning and Recreational Opportunities**

*Mental and physical fitness are improved.*

ACPS will encourage students and the community to actively use existing outdoor recreation and learning spaces and seek opportunities to develop new spaces.

## **Health and Wellness: ACPS will provide access and support that enables students to be physically, emotionally, and socially healthy and ready to learn.**

*Why this is important: Students who are healthy are better able to learn and attend school than those who are not. Students with high levels of such “developmental assets” as family support, relationships with caring non-family adults, service to others, and safe environments are more likely to engage in positive social interactions and exhibit respect, tolerance, and self-discipline. Families that are knowledgeable about health and wellness activities are able to encourage their students to make healthy decisions and pursue active lifestyles.*

### **Potential Objectives – For Discussion Purposes**

#### **5.1 Student Physical and Social-Emotional Health**

*Students are able to maximize their learning potential.*

ACPS will develop, implement, and monitor effective programs that promote physical and social-emotional wellness.

#### **5.2 Developmental Assets<sup>5</sup>**

*Students develop positive attitudes and are self-directed.*

ACPS will increase the number of students reporting 20 or more developmental assets.

#### **5.3 Physical Fitness, Recreation, and Play**

*Students have fun and prepare for active, healthy adulthood.*

ACPS will promote activities and curricula designed to promote lifelong commitments to active, healthy lifestyles among its students.

#### **5.4 Safe Routes to Schools**

*Students develop autonomy and life-long habits while helping to reduce traffic congestion.*

ACPS will encourage walking and bicycling and will collaborate with city authorities to ensure that safe routes are available and publicized.

#### **5.5 Healthy Meals and Nutrition**

*Students are prepared to learn.*

ACPS will ensure that all students have access to school meals and that they are nutritious and appealing.

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<sup>5</sup> Developmental assets are a set of skills, experiences, relationships, and behaviors that enable young people to develop into successful and contributing adults. Additional information is available from the [Search Institute](#), with which ACPS collaborates.

## **Accountability: ACPS will be responsive, efficient, effective, and accountable to students, families, and the community.**

*Why this is important: To maintain the confidence and trust of stakeholders, an organization must be transparent and accountable for its actions. It must proactively communicate its actions and management practices. For organizations to succeed at accomplishing their aims, they must have the capacity to create the right plans, access resources needed to implement plans, and ensure efficient use of resources as they are implemented.*

### **Potential Objectives – For Discussion Purposes**

#### **6.1 Operational Efficiency**

*Resources are focused on direct educational services to students.*

ACPS will utilize a comprehensive performance management system to ensure efficient and effective business operations

#### **6.2 Progress on Strategic Goals**

*Reporting on goals reassures stakeholders that the community's values are being pursued.*

ACPS will provide information needed to measure and track the school division's progress toward its goals, make program adjustments when appropriate, and report to parents, the community, and the State on performance and progress.

#### **6.3 Continuous Improvement**

*The relentless pursuit of efficiency ensures that no funds are wasted and that practices remain up-to-date.*

ACPS will engage in cycles of continuous improvement at every level of the school division, and it will employ evidence-based decision-making in its consideration of process improvements, policy making, and budgeting and accountability.

#### **6.4 School, Department, and Employee Plans**

*Strategic goals are pursued at all levels of the organization.*

ACPS will require all schools, departments, and employees to include in their annual work plans strategies for implementing this Strategic Plan, and schools and departments will prepare their own five-year plans laying out goals and objectives.

#### **6.5 Performance Excellence**

*ACPS will be a high-performing organization.*

ACPS will evaluate the Baldrige Education Criteria for Professional Excellence<sup>6</sup> for school- and district-wide improvement and determine its future use.

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<sup>6</sup> Many of the objectives under this goal can be subsumed under the Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence. The Baldrige Education Criteria provide a systems-approach for performance management that aligns an organization's strategy and resources to increase value to all stakeholders and improve performance. The Criteria reflect validated, leading-edge management practices against which an organization can measure itself. Accepted internationally as the model for performance excellence, the Criteria represent a common language for sharing best practices among organizations. Because the adoption and use of the Criteria can be time-consuming and require a central focus of all employees at all levels, the Stakeholder Committee is not recommending that ACPS adopt the Criteria at this time; the Committee, rather, is recommending that the school division evaluate whether it has the capacity and desire to implement the Criteria. .