

Jackson High School (Left) and Douglass High School (Right)  
Class of 2019

# WE ARE APSS

## BUILDING ON OUR LEGACY



ATLANTA  
PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS

Strategic Plan

2020-2025



## Foreward

On behalf of the Atlanta Board of Education and Atlanta Public Schools, we are excited to share our collective vision for the next five years. Our plan, titled “**We are APS, Building on Our Legacy,**” is about how we come together as a community to achieve our vision of a “high-performing school district where students love to learn, educators inspire, families engage, and the community trusts the system.” The plan provides an intentional focus and direction for all of us as we move through the next five years.

The 2020-2025 strategic plan creates a bold direction for our students and families centered on great public schools regardless of the neighborhood, zip code, or area of the city. This plan is ambitious because it places equity at the forefront of our work. We want this plan to serve as an important anchor of our work, focused on improving educational equity for all of our students.

Outlined in this plan are a set of equity commitments that provide a framework for staff to address educational equity in specific and impactful ways. This work will drive how we as a district define and measure student success, support and elevate teachers, provide schools the resources they need to support every child, and create conditions that help students thrive regardless of which school they attend in the district.

The strategic plan includes a revised mission, new goals, and priorities focused on improving educational outcomes and opportunities for all students.

The success of this strategic plan rests on everyone. When all of us work together to carry out our mission and strategic plan as a community, our students and graduates will have the tools and resources needed to have choice-filled lives. Through a caring culture of equity, trust, and collaboration, every student will graduate ready for college, career, and life – this strategic plan outlines the vision for this work in 2020-2025. ■

**Atlanta Board of Education**  
**Atlanta Public Schools**

# THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Engaged Committees +  
Internal Employee Groups

We want to thank our school district community for your engagement and feedback throughout the development of this strategic plan. This plan represents countless hours of feedback from stakeholders around our community. Over the past six months, students, families, teachers, staff, leaders, and community members shared their vision, their hopes, their concerns, and their ideas for the next five years.

This strategic plan outlines the goals we will accomplish together, how we will measure progress toward those goals, and the theory of action to get there. Your feedback, in all the ways the APS community came together to provide it, was invaluable in informing where we are, where we need to go, and what we need to consider to get there.

We are grateful that the APS community shared its experiences to ensure the strategic plan would reflect a diversity of perspectives. This strategic plan for 2020-2025 reflects your collective input and recognizes important priorities needed to achieve our mission and vision. ■

**1,200**  
surveys

Hosted **1<sup>st</sup>**  
**APS Table Talks**  
for parent feedback

**1,000** engaged stakeholders  
attended community conversations

**A strategic plan is a roadmap for an organization. It shows where everyone is starting, where they are headed, and all the possible pathways to get there. A good strategic plan keeps us aligned and focused, even if different schools take different paths.**

The 2015-2020 strategic plan made the strengthening of our students, schools, staff, and system the focus. In that plan, we:

- Realigned our neighborhoods into collaborative clusters of schools with common signature programs,
- Reorganized our district into a charter system that gives schools greater flexibility to serve their families and students, and
- Refined our practices, as a district to ensure schools can identify and access what they need.

That strengthening enabled us to increase our graduation rate to 77.9% with a district high of 2,506 on-time student graduates in 2019. We are also proud of our investments to begin to address equity-related challenges. For example, APS has improved the facilities infrastructure; implemented a more flexible and equitable funding formula; executed a plan to improve chronically under-performing schools; expanded Pre-K seats; integrated Social and Emotional Learning throughout the curriculum, and addressed support and practices for special populations.

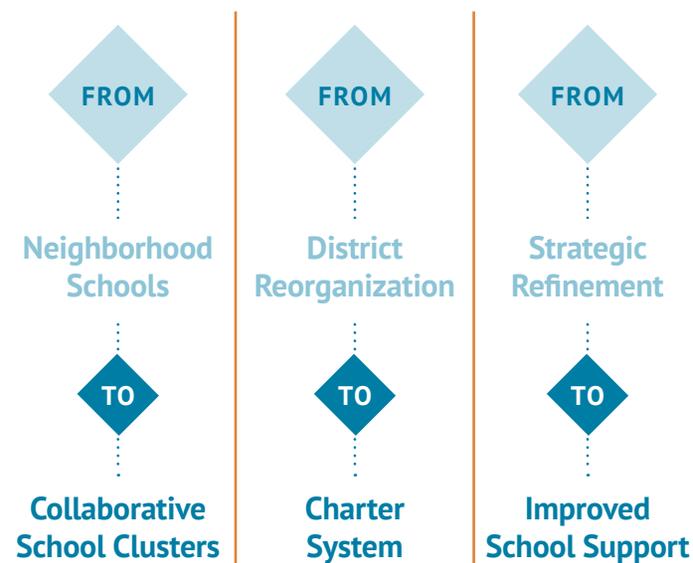
Now that we have strengthened the foundation, our community has made it clear: It is time to close gaps in opportunities between student groups and make a common expectation of excellence accessible to all. APS students, teachers, staff, neighbors, volunteers, and advocates came together from across the city to provide their perspectives through online surveys, principals' meetings, neighborhood gatherings, and a variety of other activities to talk about what is working, what needs more work, and where we should be focused for the next five years.

With a greater focus on understanding and addressing school needs, we are ready for the next critical step in preparing every APS student for college, career, and life. Excellence, equity, ethics, and engagement will continue to guide our work moving forward, we will lead with an equity lens. The strategic plan will prioritize raising the achievement of all students while minimizing the gaps between different student groups, ensuring access to opportunity across race, gender, household income, and special education status.

We are committed to using this plan to guide our collective vision for APS over the next five years. ■

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 2015-2020 in Review



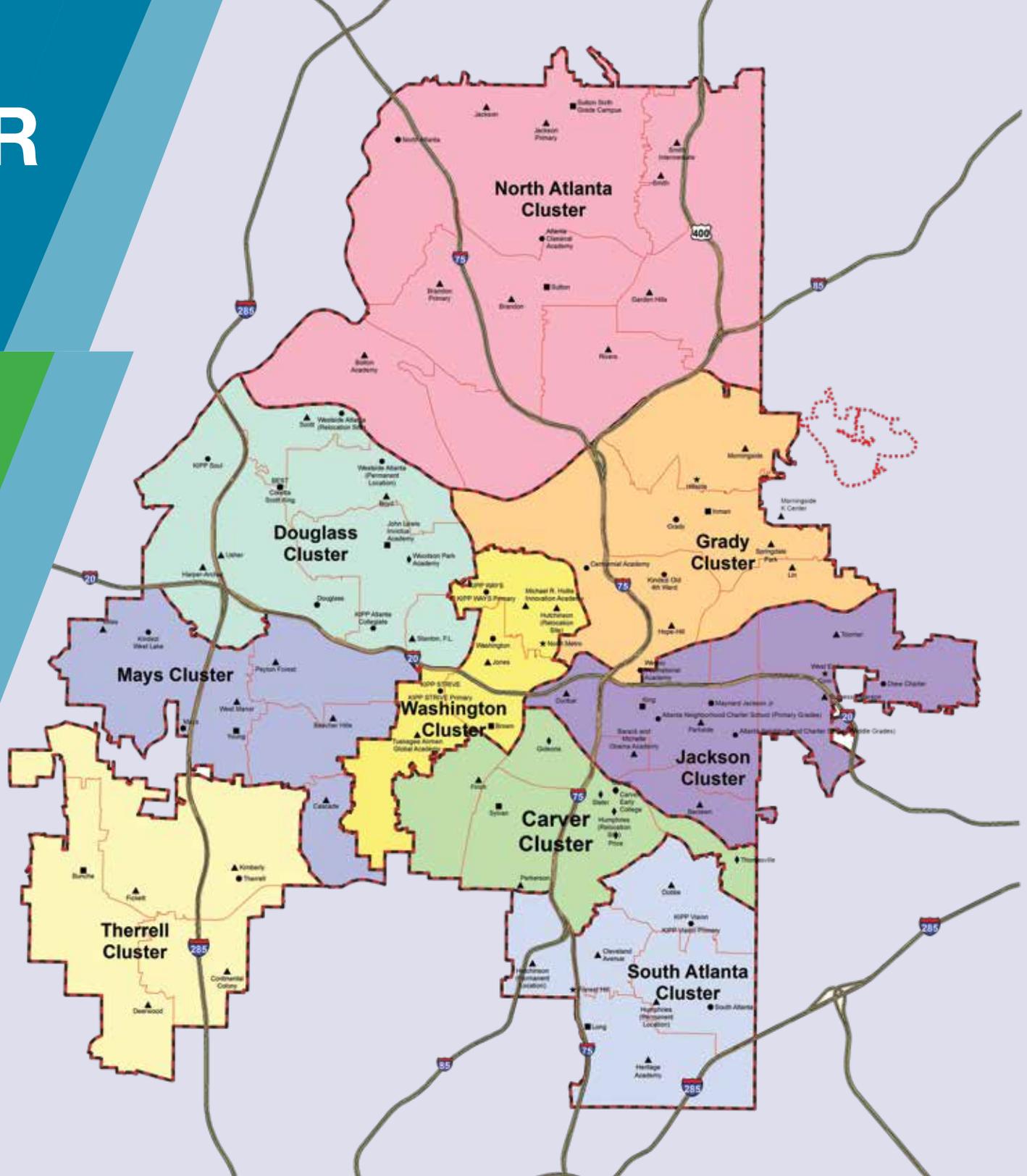
# CLUSTER MAP

9 Clusters

52,416 Students  
2020 school year projection

91 Schools + Programs

Data as of January 31, 2020





Washington High School, Class of 2019

**2,506**  
Class of 2019  
graduates

## Population

**Student**

- 72.9% African American**
- 15.9% Caucasian**
- 7.6% Hispanic**
- 2.4% Multi-racial**
- 1.3% Other**



South Atlanta High School

**16**  
GHSAs  
Middle +  
High School  
Athletic  
Programs

**21,215**  
Bus miles traveled  
per day  
**293** Total bus routes  
**32,069** Students transported

**5,294**  
Total teachers  
**3,217** Traditional  
**2,077** Non-traditional

**74.4%**  
Students qualify  
for free or  
reduced lunch

# ABOUT APS

Atlanta Public Schools is one of the largest districts in Georgia, serving more than 52,000 students throughout Atlanta. APS is organized into nine high school feeder patterns. The cluster model allows all students from the cluster elementary schools to matriculate to the same middle and high school. The cluster model ensures continuity for students from kindergarten through grade 12 and enables all students to have access to music, arts, foreign language and core academic programs. The cluster model also provides opportunities for curriculum alignment, college and career programming (i.e. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), International Baccalaureate (IB) and College & Career Prep) as well as strategies focused on student achievement. ■

# FOUNDATION

## Mission

Through a caring culture of **equity**, **trust**, and **collaboration**, **every** student will graduate ready for college, career, and life.

## Vision

A high-performing school district where students love to learn, educators inspire, families engage, and the community trusts the system.

## Guiding Principles

- **Equity** in our approach to decision-making
- **Ethics** to demonstrate our integrity
- **Engagement** with our school community
- **Excellence** in everything we do

## Core Values

1. Put students and schools first
2. Commit to teamwork
3. Focus on communication
4. Demonstrate respect for each other
5. Be accountable
6. Act with integrity
7. Embrace and drive change



Burgess-Peterson Academy

Long Middle School

# LOOKING AHEAD

# 3

**Primary Areas  
Requiring Our Focus:**

**Graduation | 1**

**75.5%**

Graduation Rate  
Black Students (2019)

**80%**

Graduation Rate  
Latino Students (2019)

**93.4%**

Graduation Rate  
White Students (2019)

**Math | 2**

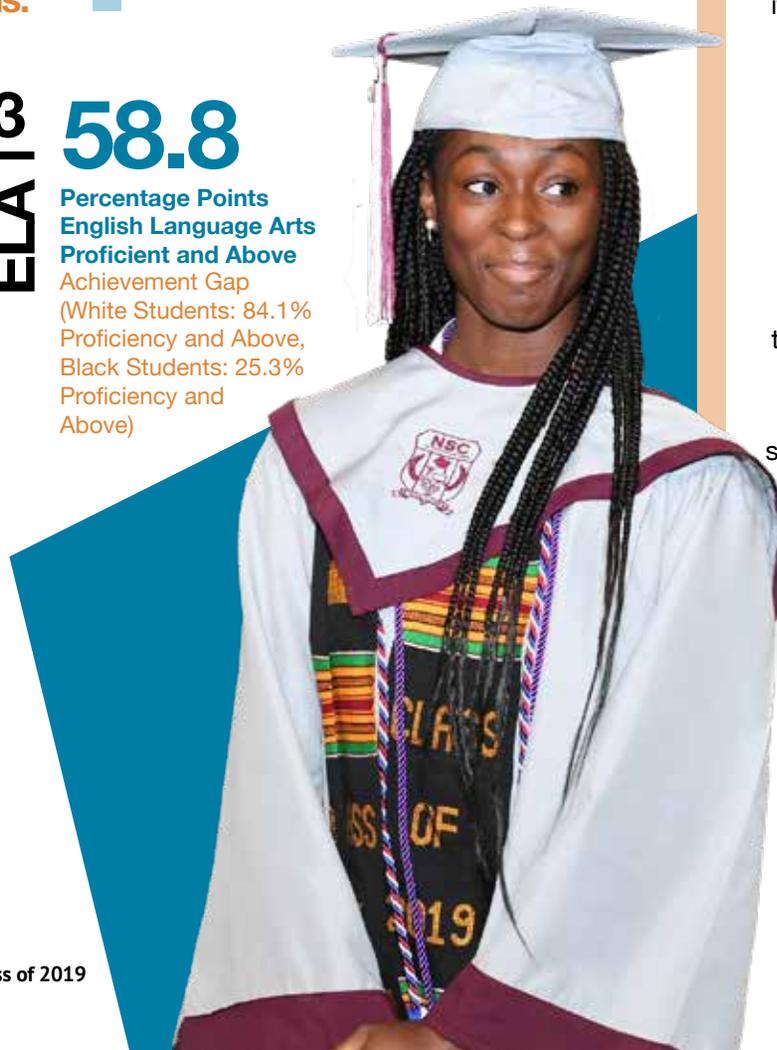
**76%**

8th Grade APS  
Students  
Not Proficient or  
Above in Math

**ELA | 3**

**58.8**

Percentage Points  
English Language Arts  
Proficient and Above  
Achievement Gap  
(White Students: 84.1%  
Proficiency and Above,  
Black Students: 25.3%  
Proficiency and  
Above)



APS has made improvements over the past five years that speak to the tremendous hard work, commitment, and growth across district schools. APS has achieved its highest gains to date in the percentage of students who scored proficient and above across all subjects on the 2019 Georgia Milestones End-of-Grade and End-of-Course Assessments. On all 24 assessments of the Milestones tests, about a third of our students scored proficient or better. More students – 2,506 of them – graduated on-time from APS in 2019 than any other year since 2012. All 17 APS schools that received targeted or partnership support as part of the initial cohort of the APS Turnaround Strategy have improved their Milestones proficiency rates since 2016. These outcomes are the result of a focus on strengthening our students, schools, staff, and system over the last five years.

We are proud of these achievements, and we recognize that access to opportunity and excellence has not been equitably accessible in our district. As we made these gains, we also maintained persistent academic gaps. Our district cannot celebrate excellence until it can be accessed equitably by all. We are committed, as a district family, to focus on the gaps in college and career readiness between students groups across our district. ■

# EQUITY

Equity is at the center of the new APS strategic plan and will guide our work as a district. The Center for Public Education (CPE) defines equity as “when all students receive the resources they need so they graduate prepared for success after high school.” CPE also provides the following definition for equality to contrast that of equity, “students are all treated the same and have access to similar resources.”



Carver Early College High School



APS Special Olympics

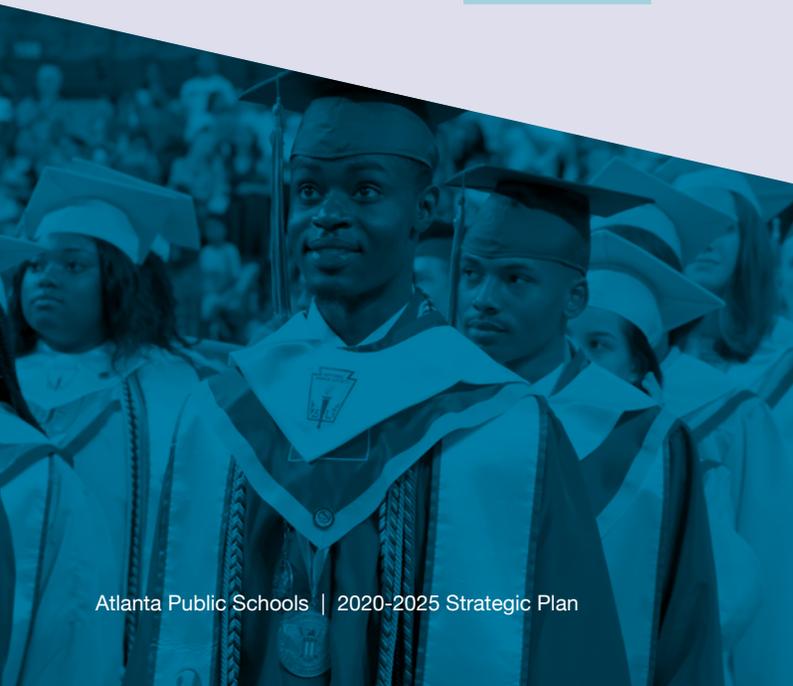
We understand that achieving educational equity will require changes to how the district fundamentally operates so that students have access to opportunities and resources to achieve their full potential. Over the years, the district has worked on a number of efforts to address pockets of inequities in the system. These initial efforts included developing equitable funding distribution strategies, strengthening the teacher workforce, and fostering inclusive policies and practices that validate students of diverse background and identities.

To support our ongoing efforts to improve educational equity and to improve equity at scale within the district, the Atlanta Board of Education working in collaboration with the community and the administration has developed an equity policy to serve as a guiding document for improving educational equity at APS.

District leaders and staff will use an equity lens to be more deliberate

in practices, operations, and actions. Outlined here are our equity commitments that speak to several focus areas we believe are instrumental to creating a more equitable school system. This framework does not identify every opportunity to advance equity but highlights areas in which the board and district leadership will focus their efforts. These commitments identify the most pressing concerns and greatest opportunities and create a framework for an equity plan that allows efforts toward educational equity to be implemented, monitored, modified, and measured over the course of the strategic plan.

It is not feasible or realistic for us to implement all of these commitments at one time. In order to lead with equity, we must plan, develop, and implement a multifaceted strategic approach that is phased over time. To that end, the district will phase this work over time throughout the course of the 2020-2025 strategic plan and develop a separate and detailed equity plan to support the district’s new equity policy. ■



Jackson High School, Class of 2019



Dobbs Elementary School

# EQUITY COMMITMENTS



Burgess-Peterson Academy

Inman Middle School

## Leveraging School Improvement to Advance Equity

We commit to integrating school improvement efforts with effective strategies and interventions to help ensure that all students can reach their full potential.

## Ensuring Equitable Funding

We commit to ensuring available funds are distributed equitably and appropriately to provide high-quality programming for all students and close resource gaps.

## Increasing Access to Effective Leaders and Teachers

We commit to ensuring all students have access to high-quality leaders and teachers, with a focus on the students with the greatest need.

## Supporting Special Populations

We commit to implementing targeted strategies to support special populations such as English learners, students with disabilities, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

## Increasing Access to Advanced Coursework

We commit to increasing access to advanced coursework for historically disadvantaged student groups.

## Addressing Disproportionate Discipline Practices

We commit to promote equity in disciplinary practices to avoid disproportionate enforcement or punishment targeting any specific student group.

## Integrating Social, Emotional, and Academic Practices

We commit to a comprehensive approach to addressing students' social, emotional, and academic development in order to meet the various needs of all students.

## Improving Access to High-Quality Instructional Programming and Materials

We commit to using effective instructional materials in all classrooms so that all students have access to high-quality curricula and robust signature programming.

## Expanding Access to Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Activities

We commit to expanding access to co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to historically disadvantaged student groups.

## Ensuring Equitable Learning Environments

We commit to providing safe, welcoming, and engaging learning environments for all students.

## Partnering with Families and Communities

We commit to partnering with families and communities to address the needs of all students.

**Promoting a culture of equity: We commit to creating a culture of equity-minded individuals**

# THEORY OF ACTION

A theory of action is a statement that outlines an organization's belief and assumptions in what will lead to long term success and change. The statement articulates how an organization will move from its current state to its desired future state.

## If We ...

Provide clear information and data on student, school, and district performance to support transparent and equitable decision-making

+

Empower and equip schools to set goals and priorities to continually improve performance

+

Engage stakeholders, identify success, and commit to timelines and effective support strategies

## Then ...

We will assess progress and be positioned to act with urgency to adjust strategies when schools are chronically under-performing

## So That ...

Every student will attain the skills, knowledge, and tools to succeed in college, career, and life

“I have a clear understanding of what defines a high-quality school and how my school is performing.”

“My school is able to address the unique needs of students and the community.”

“My school has a clear plan and the support it needs from the district and the community.”

“If my school does not improve over time, district leadership will engage communities to make decisions in the best interest of students.”

“My school is preparing every student for success.”

# STRATEGIC GOALS

The strategic goals provide guidance for APS leadership in the development of policies and regulations, objectives, strategies and initiatives to achieve the vision. The following pages communicate APS' five year strategy. These pages highlight the strategic goals, objectives, and initiatives we will pursue to close the gap between current and desired performance. All components work together to achieve our strategic vision.



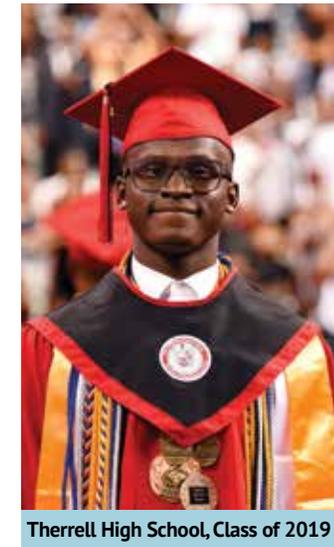
Increase the Percentage & Close the Gaps  
of students proficient or above in English Language Arts



Increase the Percentage & Close the Gaps  
of 8th grade students proficient or above in math



Increase the Percentage & Close the Gaps  
of students achieving on the SAT/ACT



Increase the Percentage & Close the Gaps  
of students graduating

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The district will also align its focus behind four key priorities across Atlanta Public Schools that will close gaps, guide resources and support for schools, and ultimately achieve the strategic goals.

## 1 We are fostering academic excellence for all.

We are closing the gaps in access that have disparate outcomes. We are identifying and addressing the needs of each student, regardless of background, so they have the skills, knowledge, and tools to succeed in college and career.

## 2 We are building a culture of student support.

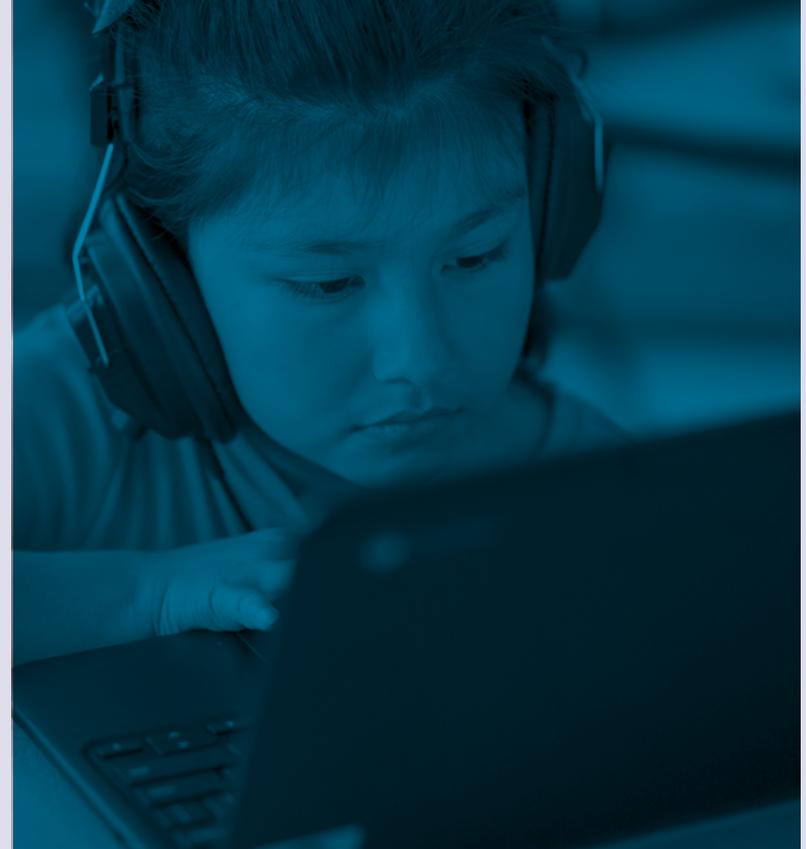
Students are attending schools and learning in classrooms that bring a sense of belonging, inclusiveness, care, joy, safety, and collaboration. The student-centered culture fosters being a part of something bigger than oneself, which leads to a sense of responsibility and encourages the well-being and development of each student.

## 3 We are equipping and empowering leaders and staff.

We are rallying teachers, staff, volunteers, families, and community members to create a cohesive coalition of support for each student, investing in their success. Every staff member is given the training support, coaching, and advocacy needed to build their skills and raise the bar for excellence.

## 4 We are creating a system of support for schools.

By creating effective and equitable processes and systems, schools are better positioned to address the needs of their students and their community. ■



Garden Hills Elementary School

# OBJECTIVES

## 1 We are fostering academic excellence for all

- Expand the impact of schools that are closing racial and socio-economic achievement gaps by sharing best practices and implementing the program elements that have led to their success
- Focus on PK-12 literacy and mathematics
- Equip students for college and career readiness across the PK-12 continuum (eg. signature programming, advanced coursework, pathways)



Wesley International Charter School

## 2 We are building a culture of student support

- Provide services to address the social, emotional, mental, and behavioral well-being of all students (e.g. wraparound supports, SEL)
- Equitably increase opportunities and participation in enrichment (core and extended core) and holistic development based on individual student interest
- Invest in evidence-based 21st Century school learning environments, while monitoring implementation and effectiveness
- Promote environments that value inclusiveness and collaboration (e.g. students with disabilities, English learners)



John Lewis Invictus Academy

## 3 We are equipping and empowering leaders and staff

- Attract, grow, support, and retain the highest quality leaders, teachers and staff
- Promote adult mindsets that positively impact the pursuit of equity and fairness
- Partner with families and the community to include business and non-profit organizations to support all schools
- Provide services to improve the engagement and overall well-being of all staff
- Create opportunities for outstanding staff to stay in APS and expand their reach through additional leadership roles



Boyd Elementary School

## 4 We are creating a system of support for schools

- Continuously improve service-focused and responsive support to schools, as well as district-wide operational processes
- Adopt an equity-minded timeline for effective support strategies in each school based on school needs
- Continuously explore and consider additional effective support and intervention strategies
- Continue to enable school-level autonomy for all schools
- Set goals to equitably distribute and maximize resources to schools ■

**Deliberate**  
actions + **Focused**  
determination  
= **APS Equity**

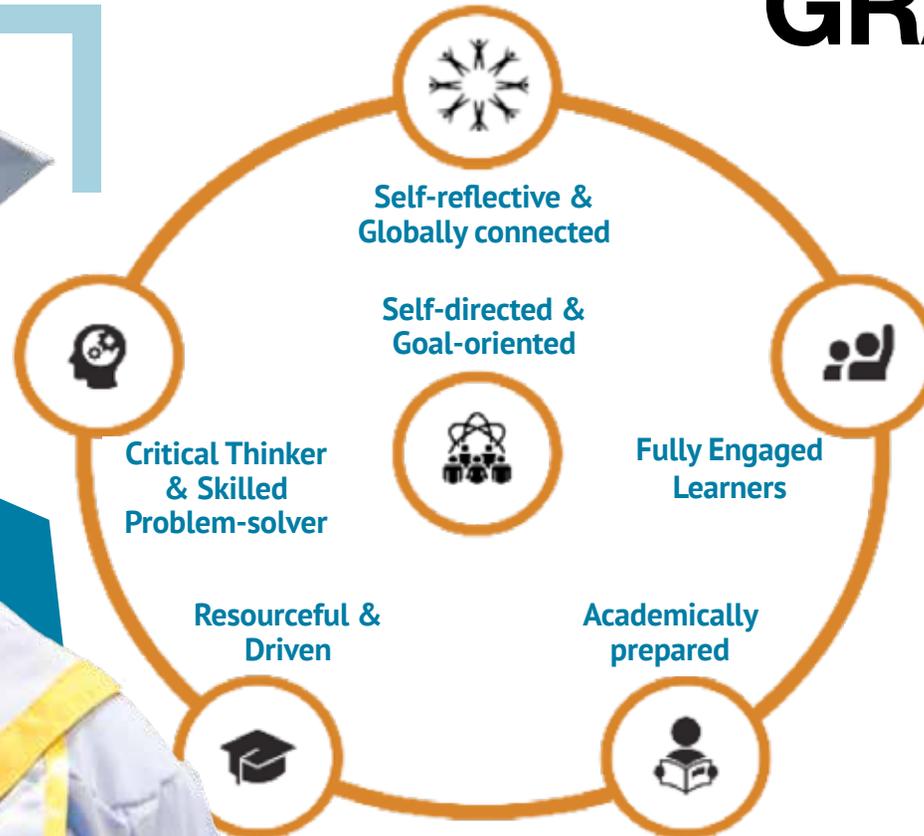
# STRATEGIC WORK STREAMS

Strategic work streams are comprised of strategic initiatives, projects and programs designed to help the organization achieve its targeted performance through specific actions steps. The strategic work streams provide areas the organization will focus on throughout the duration of the plan to address priorities and goals.

- 1 We are fostering academic excellence for all**
  - Curricular and Instructional Programming With Aligned Professional Learning
  - Non-Proficient Learner Targeted Support
  - College and Career Readiness Programming (e.g. Signature Programs, College and Career Academy)
  - Early Learning
- 2 We are building a culture of student support**
  - Comprehensive Framework for Whole Child Support
  - Enrichment and Holistic Development Expansion Plan
  - English Language Learners (ELL) and Students with Disabilities (SWD) Professional Learning
- 3 We are equipping & empowering leaders & staff**
  - District-wide Equity Plan
  - High-quality Staff Recruitment and Retention
  - Families and Communities Support
  - Non-instructional Staff Development
- 4 We are creating a system of support for schools**
  - District-wide Processes and Systems Improvement
  - Roadmap and Framework for Autonomy and Flexibility



# PROFILE OF A GRADUATE



Our vision for teaching and learning, exemplified by the characteristics of the APS Profile of a Graduate, is an exciting step toward preparing each student for their journey into the future, and preparing our staff to help guide the way. As we prepare each student to graduate ready for college, career, and life, APS will use this Portrait of a Graduate to further define the knowledge, skills, and mindsets expected of our graduates. We believe the profile characteristics are critical skills for engaged citizenship, successful career paths beyond high school, and meaningful community involvement. We are excited to explore how each of the profile characteristics will be demonstrated at different ages. ■

## Atlanta Public Schools

**Meria J. Carstarphen**  
Superintendent

**David Jernigan**  
Deputy Superintendent

**Lisa Bracken**  
Chief Financial Officer

**Nina Gupta**  
General Counsel

**Bill Caritj**  
Chief Accountability & Information  
Officer

**Skye Duckett**  
Chief Human Resources Officer

**Larry Hoskins**  
Chief Operating Officer

**Angela King Smith**  
Chief Engagement Officer

---

## Atlanta Board of Education

**Jason F. Esteves, Chair**  
At-Large Seat 9

**Eshé P. Collins, Vice Chair**  
District 6

**Leslie Grant** | District 1

**Arreta L. Baldon** | District 2

**Michelle D. Olympiadis** | District 3

**Nancy M. Meister** | District 4

**Erika Y. Mitchell** | District 5

**Kandis Wood Jackson**  
At-Large Seat 7

**Cynthia Briscoe Brown**  
At-Large Seat 8

---



130 Trinity Ave., SW  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
404.802.3500