

# Strategic Direction (Values and Goals)

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Atlanta Public Schools is hosting a series of community meetings to help shape the district's five-year strategic plan. Board members are leading the first set of meetings to update the district's goals and guardrails, emphasizing the importance of community feedback in defining the district's vision and priorities. The meeting was structured to gather input through group discussions and a survey, ensuring the final plan reflects what families and stakeholders want for students' futures. The board asked two main questions during the session, and participants' feedback is summarized below.

## What Should Students Know or Be Able to Do by the Time They Leave APS?

### Main Themes:

- **Strong Reading, Writing, and Math Skills** – Students should be able to read, write, and perform basic math operations at or above grade level.
- **Critical Thinking & Problem Solving** – Schools should focus on developing students' ability to analyze, reason, and apply knowledge to real-world situations.
- **Social Skills, Emotional Well-being, & Community Engagement** – Students need skills to collaborate, communicate, and manage emotions effectively. They should also be able to self-regulate, resolve conflicts, and engage with their communities through civic responsibility.
- **Career & Life Readiness (Including Financial Literacy)** – High school graduates should have a clear post-secondary plan, whether it's college, a trade, or employment. They should also have financial literacy skills, including budgeting, credit management, and investing.
- **Technology & STEM Proficiency** – Exposure to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), as well as how to use AI and other modern tools.

### Direct Quotes:

- *“Reading and writing on your grade level is a basic skill that everyone needs to know, whether you're in third grade or high school.”*
- *“Students should be able to read literature, but also technical documents, like building codes, if they go into construction.”*

- *“Every student should know and be able to do science, technology, engineering, art, and math—STEM.”*
- *“We need to meet students where they are. They are not the same students they were pre-COVID.”*
- *“Learning that you’re going to school for more than just yourself is important—students should engage with their community and understand civic responsibility.”*
- *“Students need to know how to self-regulate and resolve conflicts in healthy ways.”*  
*“Financial literacy is key—students need to leave APS knowing how to budget, manage credit, and invest for their future.”*

## What Should APS Stop or Avoid Doing to Better Support Student Outcomes?

- **Placing Underqualified Teachers in Struggling Schools Without Proper Support** – Low-performing schools need experienced teachers. If new teachers are in training programs, they must receive high-quality professional development to be effective.
- **Focusing on Graduation Rates Over Real Learning** – High graduation rates mean little if students still struggle with reading, writing, or math.
- **Wasting Money on Ineffective Programs** – APS should invest in what truly helps students, such as teacher training and academic resources, rather than unnecessary initiatives.
- **Only Preparing Students for College, Not Careers** – Not every student will attend college. Schools must offer strong career pathways, including vocational training and life skills.
- **Making Decisions Without Community Input, Including Hiring Leaders** – Parents, teachers, and community members should have a voice in major school decisions, including who leads their schools.
- **Underutilizing Valuable Resources That Could Support Students** – APS invests in many resources that are not being fully used. One example is school libraries, where some schools are removing librarians, and students are not being taught how to use library services. Many students struggle with reading, yet libraries could provide vital support.
- **Lacking Accountability for Parents, Students, and Charter Schools** – Teachers are held accountable, but students, parents, and charter schools should be as well. Charter schools that underperform should face consequences.
- **Prioritizing Athletics Over Academics in Funding** – Some schools spend far more on sports than academics. Funding should be balanced so all students receive strong academic support.
- **Waiting for Crises Instead of Taking Preventative Action** – APS must be **proactive, not reactive**, addressing issues before they become major problems.
- **Keeping Ineffective Staff Instead of Prioritizing Strong Educators** – The district should retain teachers and leaders who are highly effective or on track to be highly effective, rather than just those who meet minimum standards.

- **Restricting Access to Effective Teaching Strategies** – Schools should **share best practices** across the district to help all students succeed.

## Direct Quotes

- *“If you're in a low-performing school, you need teachers who have been through the trenches to bring students up to where they need to be.”*
- *“Stop spending money recklessly on consultants, platforms, programs, and stipends that don't lead to student improvement.”*
- *“We should stop overemphasizing college readiness while not equally preparing students for career options.”*
- *“Parents and students should be held accountable too—not just teachers.”*
- *“Making top-down decisions without stakeholder input damages trust and leads to ineffective policies.”*
- *“Charter schools should be held accountable just like public schools—if they are underperforming, there should be consequences.”*
- *“At my child's school, athletics received \$300,000 in stipends while academics only got \$30,000. That balance is off.”*
- *“We should be keeping teachers who are highly effective or on track to be highly effective, not just those who meet the bare minimum.”*
- *“There should be no gatekeeping when it comes to instructional strategies and resources that improve student outcomes.”*