



Atlanta Public Schools' System of Excellent Schools Framework For Board Consideration - March 4, 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Atlanta Public Schools (APS) System of Excellent Schools (SES) project is being presented after an extensive eight month engagement and design process and in alignment with the Board's goal of creating a comprehensive strategy to increase the number of quality schools in the District. The SES deliverables were developed with the purpose of ensuring that every student in Atlanta, regardless of neighborhood, attends an excellent school. The project was intended to provide clarity on APS' vision of excellence; knit together and deepen implementation of APS' current work supporting and transforming schools, including through its turnaround strategy, and set the stage for APS' next strategic plan.

Specifically, through 100+ hours of community and stakeholder engagement, the SES project has provided the opportunity to:

- Align on and establish a definition of school excellence that integrates with existing definitions of teaching and leadership excellence and includes a profile of an APS graduate;
- Determine how to best measure schools' progress toward excellence; and
- Determine how to respond when schools do or don't fulfill the vision, including how to best advance the vision through a system of excellent schools that includes neighborhood, charter and partner schools, but may also include other new school models such as empowerment schools.

Through the SES project, the APS community collaborated to shape three main deliverables:

1. A Vision of Excellence and Graduate Profile that integrates with other district systems to define the characteristics of excellent schools, the graduates they seek to develop, and the learning experiences that prepare APS students for college and career.
2. A draft list of possible measures for an Excellent Schools Framework that translates the Vision of Excellence into specific, quantifiable measures of school performance to enable planning, analysis, differentiation of supports, and public transparency.
3. An Excellent Schools Support and Action Framework that both a) outlines a possible list of differentiated supports the District is committed to offering schools in response to their individual needs, their community contexts, and the data and insight generated through the Excellent Schools Framework and b) includes a list of actions that may apply to schools with sustained performance in a given performance category of the Excellent Schools Framework.

In response to feedback from the Board and community, these deliverables have evolved multiple times over the course of the engagement. As an example, in recent months, several



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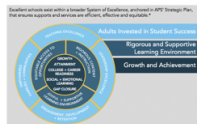
constituents noted the importance of calling-out differentiated school supports as an integral part of a school supports and actions framework.

Illustration: Three draft tools that can facilitate a System of Excellent Schools

Vision of Excellence

Vision and Graduate Profile

Integrates with other key district systems to define the characteristics of excellent schools, the graduates they seek to develop, and the learning experiences that prepare APS students for college and career



Excellent Schools Framework

Possible Measures

Translates the Vision of Excellence into specific, quantifiable measures of school performance to enable planning, analysis, differentiation of supports, and public transparency

Measure	Indicator	Target	Current	Notes
Student Achievement	Statewide Assessment	85%	82%	...
Student Achievement	College and Career Readiness	90%	88%	...
Student Achievement	Graduation Rate	95%	93%	...
Student Achievement	Attendance	95%	93%	...
Student Achievement	Chronic Absence	10%	12%	...
Student Achievement	Dropout Rate	5%	7%	...
Student Achievement	Retention Rate	5%	7%	...
Student Achievement	Special Education	10%	12%	...
Student Achievement	English Language Learners	10%	12%	...
Student Achievement	Gifted and Talented	10%	12%	...
Student Achievement	Low Income	10%	12%	...
Student Achievement	Black	10%	12%	...
Student Achievement	Hispanic	10%	12%	...
Student Achievement	Asian	10%	12%	...
Student Achievement	White	10%	12%	...
Student Achievement	Two or more races	10%	12%	...
Student Achievement	Other	10%	12%	...

Excellent Schools Support and Action Framework

Ongoing System of Support

Outlines a possible list of differentiated supports the district is committed to offering schools in response to their individual needs, their community contexts, and the data and insight generated through the Excellent Schools Framework

School Action Framework

Outlines a possible list of actions that may apply to schools with sustained performance in a given performance category of the Excellent Schools Framework



These deliverables are described in more detail below.

Vision of Excellence

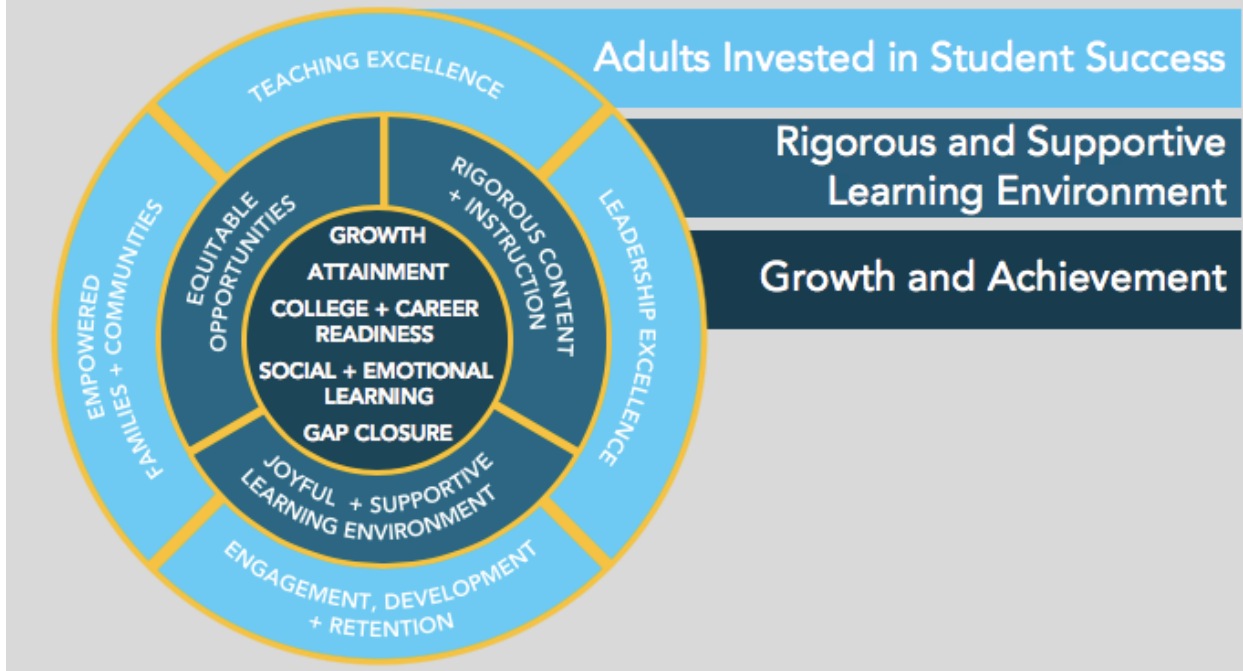
The Vision of Excellence identifies the characteristics of excellent schools, as identified through extensive community engagement. All together, the Vision comprises three “domains” (broad areas of school excellence) and twelve total “indicators” (specific attributes of school excellence) as represented below.

Illustration: Vision of Excellence domains and indicators



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Excellent schools exist within a broader System of Excellence, anchored in APS’ Strategic Plan, that ensures supports and services are efficient, effective and equitable.



APS’ commitment to equity is woven throughout the framework, as various indicators speak to the need to *remedy opportunity and learning gaps and create a barrier-free environment that enables all students to graduate ready for college and career*. In April, 2019, the Board will consider a new equity policy, after which the representation of APS’ equity focus will be re-evaluated within the Vision.

The Vision represents Atlanta’s unique definition of school excellence and stands out from other frameworks reviewed from across the nation in several ways. First, the concentric rings that outline the Vision’s three domains posit a “theory of action” or logical relationship where having adults invested in students creates the needed foundation to establish the enabling conditions of a rigorous and supportive learning environment that can then, in turn, lead to outcomes for students. Second, the Vision comprehensively incorporates stakeholder perceptions and feedback (from students, parents and staff) across each of the three domains. Third, while the Vision draws from and seeks to build upon Georgia’s College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI), it is distinct from CCRPI in its inclusion of a holistic set of indicators, such as students’ social and emotional development.

APS recognizes also that school excellence is dependent, in part, on creating a broader System of Excellence across the district, as outlined in APS’ strategic plan and depicted visually by the



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Vision of Excellence sitting within a broader box. The district is committed to creating a service-oriented ecosystem in support of school excellence and to soliciting and responding to school feedback about the quality and desirability of supports and services offered by central office. Ensuring and measuring central office excellence and the efficiency, efficacy and equitability of specific supports and resource allocation decisions should therefore be a priority of the district’s next strategic plan.

The Vision’s three domains and twelve indicators are described in more detail below.

Domain 1
ADULTS INVESTED IN STUDENT SUCCESS

The school strategically leverages and supports teachers, school leaders, families and community partners in serving as equal and effective stewards of student success.

Indicators for Domain 1
1A. Teaching Excellence: Teachers are advancing achievement for all students and adults hold high expectations of students
1B. Leadership Excellence: School leadership is effective; allocates people, time and money toward priorities; and holds high expectations for adults and students
1C. Engagement, Development and Retention: Staff feel supported, are developing their skills, deepening their connections with each other, growing their social and emotional competencies, and are retained at the school over time
1D. Empowered Families and Communities: Families are equipped with the information and resources they need to advocate for their students, the community trusts the school, and partners are invested in its mission

Domain 2
RIGOROUS AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The school has a safe, trusting, and collaborative environment conducive to learning, where all students are exposed to rigor and needed interventions, are challenged to achieve, take ownership of their academic journey, and are deeply and joyfully engaged in learning.

Indicators for Domain 2



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2A. Rigorous Content and Instruction: All students are exposed to rigorous and relevant content and instruction that is standards-based, culturally responsive and challenging

2B. Equitable Opportunities: All students have equitable support services and opportunities for enrichment and holistic development

2C. Joyful and Supportive Learning Environment: The school environment is clean and safe; students, families and staff have strong, trusting interpersonal relationships; students are supported with needed interventions; students feel supported to take risks and take ownership of their academic journey; and students' learning experiences are joyful and challenging

Domain 3
GROWTH AND ACHIEVEMENT

The school ensures that all students, regardless of background, attain the skills, knowledge bases, mindsets and dispositions they need to succeed in college, career and community. Students of all backgrounds make needed annual growth to ensure they graduate with the social, emotional and academic skills needed for success and this growth results in the closure or elimination of gaps between student subgroups.

Indicators for Domain 3

3A. Growth: Students of all achievement levels are making annual growth

3B. Attainment: Students are performing at or above grade level expectations

3C. College and Career Readiness: Both before and during high school, students are increasing their readiness for college and career so they can enter postsecondary education without remediation and are competitive in the job market

3D. Social and Emotional and Whole Child Learning: Students are actively developing social and emotional competencies and mindsets needed for lifelong citizenship and a social justice orientation

3E. Gap Closure: Inequitable learning gaps between student subgroups are closing



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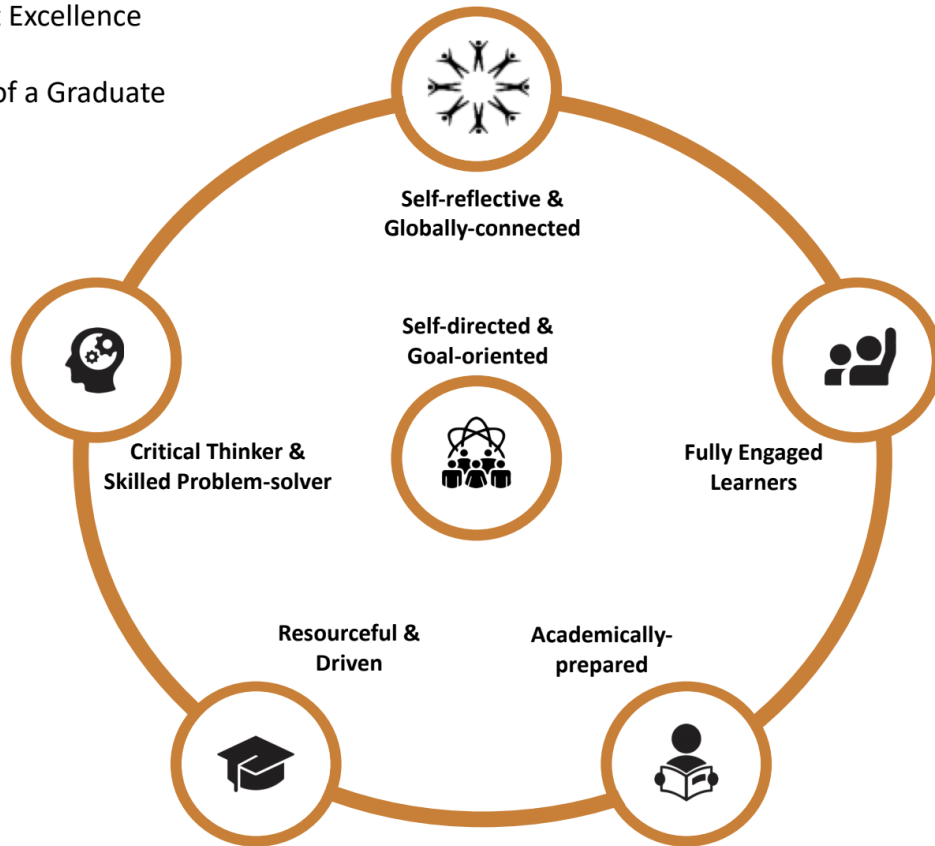
Portrait of a Graduate

The administration is in the process of developing a Portrait of a Graduate that it will use internally to support communication about the knowledge, skills and mindsets it expects excellent schools will develop in their graduates. The working draft is included here:

APS Definitions of Student Excellence

DRAFT

Profile of a Graduate



Excellent Schools Framework

The Excellent Schools Framework translates the indicators of the Vision of Excellence into specific, quantifiable measures. A wide range of existing measures was considered, including those in the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI), as well as through



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school-level data on APS Insights and the Governor's Office of Student Achievement data portal.

Each measure was evaluated for its fitness for use based on six main design principles for the Excellent Schools Framework:

1. Build from the state's CCRPI when appropriate and possible;
2. Go beyond test scores to create a holistic view of school performance;
3. Place social and emotional and whole child learning alongside academic outcomes at the core of the model;
4. Organize logically, connecting inputs required for student success to expected outcomes;
5. Prioritize areas that are in schools' locus of control; and
6. Include common measures that apply to all school types, with the exception of alternative education campuses.

This analysis resulted in approximately 70 measures that must be further examined and refined for their measurement validity. This list is preliminary. Approximately one third of these measures (29%) come from a readily available data source and do not require additional development before use. Another half (55%) come from data sources that require some evaluation and improvement before use. The remainder (16%) do not have an extant data source and require data creation and measure development. While APS is optimistic that valid and reliable measurements can be established for all indicators over time, it also recognizes that improving current measures and finding needed new measures will require a substantial investment of people, time and money. While working to finalize a comprehensive set of measures aligned to the Vision of Excellence, the administration will pay particular attention to identifying measures that will both inform school and district continuous improvement and that will be sustainable to collect over time.

While the Excellent Schools Framework provides clarity on how to measure schools' progress toward excellence, it does not measure the equally important work of ensuring that central office supports and services are also excellent, measured, and progress-monitored in a similarly rigorous manner. The Board and leadership have committed to prioritizing central office support and service improvement in the next strategic planning process, including by assessing resource allocation decisions, while also working to continue to make immediate improvements. The Board and leadership are committed to improving and progress monitoring supports and services in tandem with developing the details of the System of Excellent Schools framework.

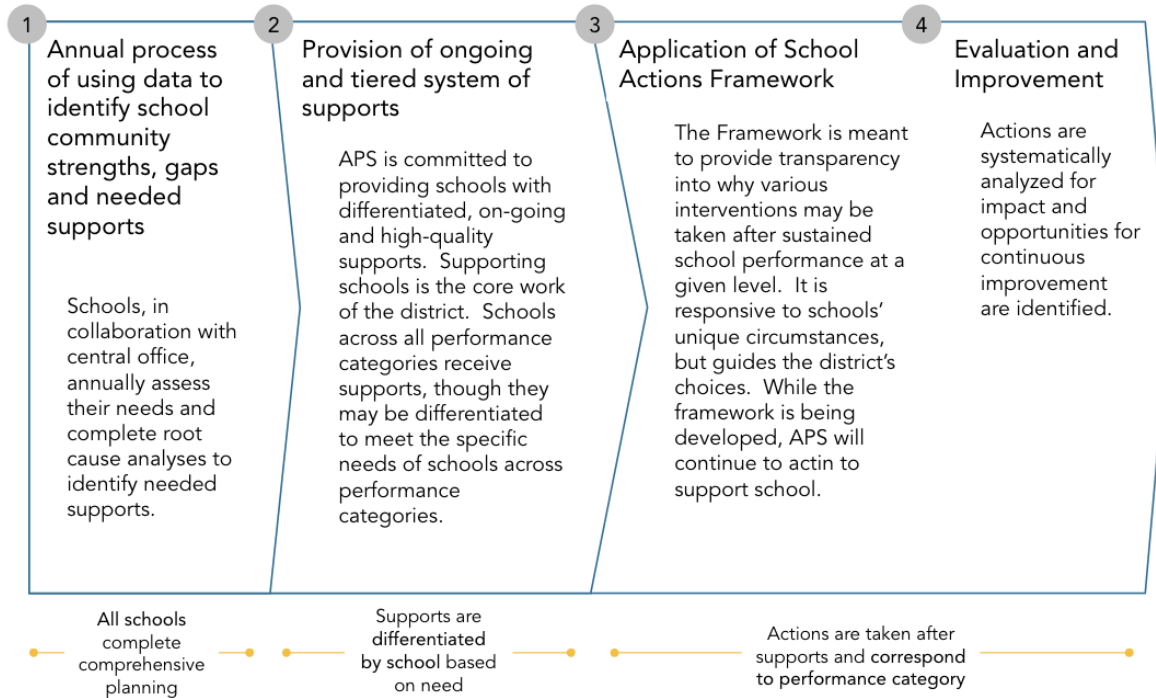
Excellent Schools Support and Action Framework



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Finally, the Support and Action Framework outlines a deliberate process of analysis and continuous improvement that, once fully developed, will guide the district in responding to the results of the Excellent Schools Framework. District-wide, a four-stage process will guide the approach to school support and action planning, as shown below.

Illustration: Four-stage continuous improvement process for building a System of Excellent Schools



Annually, all schools will complete a comprehensive planning process in collaboration with the central office using data to identify strengths, gaps and needed supports. These “root cause” analyses guide the selection of appropriate supports to improve school excellence. Because supporting schools is the core work of the district, APS will provide ongoing and differentiated supports to schools based on these needs and data related to root causes. All schools are eligible for support regardless of their performance category on the Excellent Schools Framework, though supports may be differentiated to meet the specific needs of each school. When a school performs consistently at a given level of the Excellent Schools Framework, APS may consider and take a designated action or actions to improve the school or otherwise expand the number of students enrolled in excellent schools. Finally, over time, supports provided and actions taken across the district will be systematically evaluated for their impact and opportunities for continuous improvement will be identified.¹

¹ A plan to strengthen services and supports provided by central office will be developed and monitored as part of APS' next strategic planning effort and is an essential element of this framework.



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The supports associated with step 2 described above, which are targeted based on schools' needs and root cause analyses, may include but are not limited to:

- Providing autonomies to all schools;
- Codifying, celebrating, and sharing best practices;
- Systematically assessing school community strengths and gaps and supporting school leaders in developing a plan and implementing a set of strategies appropriate to their school community's needs;
- Providing universal or intensive supports to meet unique needs across performance categories;
- Creating intentional collaboration structures to share with and learn across schools;
- Incentivizing high performing teachers and leaders to support lower performing schools;
- Increasing focus on teacher development and retention;
- Increasing focus on leadership development and retention;
- Intensifying whole-school supports and oversight;
- Increasing non-academic support personnel; and
- Increasing personnel to provide targeted academic support to students (e.g., reading and math specialists).

The actions associated with step 3 described above have been developed in part by studying similar systems in peer districts across the nation (particularly districts making outsized improvement); reviewing available school improvement research; and engaging in conversation with the Board, administration, school leaders, and the community. As the Support and Action Framework is further developed and then implemented, specific actions may be targeted to schools performing consistently at a given level of the Excellent Schools Framework. This creates the transparency and predictability schools and communities desire, while also preserving the administration's authority to ultimately recommend actions that take school and community context into consideration.

Actions that have been initially explored and that will be more fully explored and developed by the administration include but are not limited to:

- Expanding high performing schools or program elements;
- Extending empowerment status to one or more schools in order to accelerate autonomy and accountability;
- Expanding enrollment;
- In partnership with the community, creating a school improvement or redesign plan that includes Board-monitored performance goals;
- Implementing a strategic staffing project to incentivize proven teachers to support school improvement;
- Enabling student transfer to higher performing schools;



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- Securing a partner to collaborate with the district to operate the school;
- Merging a lower performing school with a higher performing school;
- Reconstituting staff and leadership; and
- Closing, possibly with a re-launch and/or a solicitation for new school petitions.

Implementation Timeline

Pending approval of the SES approach for continued district transformation, several key activities would unfold between spring and summer 2019, a pilot effort beginning in school year 2019-20 and stages of implementation across school years 2020-21 through 2023-24. As part of implementation planning, an analysis of budget implications and resource allocation decisions will be conducted. An illustrative timeline is shown below.

Illustration: Draft implementation timeline for Excellent Schools Framework and Excellent Schools Support and Action Framework

WINTER 2019	SPRING / SUMMER 2019	SY19-20	SY20-21	SY21-22	SY22-23	SY23-24
<p><u>February</u> Presentation of SES deliverables for Board consideration</p> <p><u>March 4</u> Consider and vote on relevant actions from the SES project</p>	<p>Build ESF Develop a comprehensive set of measures, floors, goals and weights to complete the design of the Excellent Schools Framework Set up necessary data creation processes</p> <p>Adopt plan Adopt and begin implementation of a multi-year plan for all System of Excellent Schools work</p>	<p>Pilot ESF Pilot the Excellent Schools Framework in order to gain data to inform its refinement and finalization</p>	<p>First year of ESF Implement the System of Excellent Schools work</p>			<p>First year of actions Utilize actions framework based on multiple years of ESF results</p>
<p>Study, pilot and refine Support and Action Framework Determine implementation criteria for the Excellent Schools Support and Action Framework</p>						
<p>Develop and improve framework to measure excellence of services and supports for schools</p>			<p>Provide, evaluate and improve school supports</p>			
<p>Continue to design and facilitate opportunities for broad stakeholder engagement</p>						
<p>Assess progress, risks, benefits*</p>		<p>Assess progress, risks, benefits</p>		<p>Assess progress, risks, benefits</p>		

*Annual assessment should include financial implications and new stakeholder input

As described above, a significant research and development effort remains to construct a valid and reliable Excellent Schools Framework and a robust Excellent Schools Support and Action Framework. Throughout school year 2019-20, APS will work to develop and pilot the ESF for implementation in school year 2020-21. The Support and Action Framework will be more fully developed and refined beginning in school year 2019-20, with specific supports and actions piloted starting in 2020-21 to be ready for full implementation in school year 2023-24. The sequence of which supports to improve and actions to pilot may be informed by demand from principals. As an example, should a principal or group of principals wish to pilot the use of additional autonomies through an “empowerment school” designation, the district could work in partnership to develop and test that strategy.



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<p>Strategy</p>	<p>Implementation of the System of Excellent Schools approach for continued district transformation</p>
<p>Board Action</p>	<p>Authorization for the Superintendent to design a System of Excellent Schools strategy with ongoing community and stakeholder engagement. This includes, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adoption of a district-wide Vision of Excellence for schools and a corresponding Portrait of a Graduate that will serve as the anchor of the next APS Strategic plan; ● Start the development of the measures related to the Vision of Excellence and continued exploration of an Excellent Schools Framework as part of the strategic planning process; and ● Continued exploration of an Excellent Schools Support and Action Framework as part of the strategic planning process. <p>The Superintendent shall partner with the Board during the strategic planning process to determine the appropriate way to integrate the Vision of Excellence and Portrait of a Graduate into the next APS Strategic Plan. . Further, as part of its annual budget approval process, the Board will consider and approve expenditures related to this work.</p>
<p>Summary</p>	<p>Adoption of the System of Excellent Schools project deliverables will provide the APS community an opportunity to align on a clear Vision of Excellence and better enable APS to accelerate progress toward ensuring all students have access to an excellent school.</p> <p>The Vision of Excellence and Portrait of a Graduate will serve as guiding documents to support increased alignment and coherence across the district. Upon approval, the Superintendent will develop and enact an implementation plan.</p> <p>The development of an Excellent Schools Framework will enable the district to monitor progress toward its Atlanta-specific Vision of Excellence and then align school supports and actions in response to the data. Upon approval, the Superintendent will finalize all implementation details, such as measures, weights and floors, in alignment with the adopted Vision of Excellence and the design principles identified throughout the SES planning process. The ESF will be piloted only after the Superintendent is confident in the validity and reliability of available measures and the implications for people, time and money.</p>



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	<p>The development of an Excellent Schools Support and Action Framework will provide transparency and clarity to schools and the community on the range of differentiated support available, as well as the range of actions the district will consider when a school has persisted at the same performance level for multiple years. (The specific number of years is an example of an implementation detail yet to be determined.) Upon approval, the Superintendent will continue to develop and refine implementation details. Between now and full implementation of an actions framework in school year 2023-24, the Superintendent will continue to recommend, as needed, actions already in use by APS and will respond to school leaders requesting that new actions be considered.</p> <p>The Board also envisions developing a system to measure and continuously improve the quality of central office supports and services within the same timeframe and as part of its next strategic plan.</p>
Financial Impact	The annual financial impact is estimated to be up to \$725,000 to support the implementation and maintenance of the Excellent Schools Framework