

ANCS Strategic Plan 2014-2017 – Background and Introduction

In July 2011, the Neighborhood Charter School and Atlanta Charter Middle School merged to form the Atlanta Neighborhood Charter School (ANCS), a K-8 public charter school with two campuses in southeast Atlanta. The 2014-15 school year marks the 13th anniversary of the opening of the school's elementary campus, with ANCS today serving approximately 675 students, supported by 93 teachers and staff members, and guided by the common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools.

Since the merger that formed ANCS, the school has faced numerous external challenges, including significant declines in local and state funding and changing accountability requirements for charter schools. Despite these challenges, ANCS is succeeding in fulfilling its mission. The school has exceeded the academic goals in its charter, with ANCS students outperforming peers in APS and Georgia on the CRCT and writing tests. Over 90% of students, parents/guardians, and faculty/staff survey respondents are satisfied with the educational experience at ANCS, and over 90% of alumni student and parent/guardian survey respondents feel ANCS prepared them well for high school. ANCS has been awarded over \$1.3 million in grant funding to support programs and development. The Georgia Charter Schools Association named ANCS one of three finalists for its "Charter School of the Year" Award in 2014.

In order to continue to provide an exceptional experience for its school community, ANCS is building on its history of success by undergoing a strategic planning process over the past 10 months aimed at identifying key strategic issues to improve the school's ability to carry out its mission and achieve its vision. During this process, an outside consultant conducted a situation analysis through a review of data and feedback from the following sources:

- Interviews of ANCS leadership team and governing board members
- Surveys distributed to all faculty/staff and parents
- Nine separate focus groups: students, faculty/staff, and parents
- Interviews and/or surveys of 30 different external stakeholders, including representatives from APS, local funders, elected officials, and national education experts

The consultant then worked with a diverse strategic planning committee of faculty/staff, board members, and parents to review the situation analysis and determine a draft of key strategic issues in the following areas:

1. Teaching & Learning
2. Diversity
3. Faculty & Staff Development
4. Parent & Community Partnership
5. Fundraising & Resource Development
6. Facilities & Operations
7. Governance Capacity

On the pages that follow you'll find the following documents that form the draft of the 2014-2017 ANCS Strategic Plan:

1. ***One page overview of plan*** that shows how the mission and vision drive three-year objectives for each strategic priority and the strategic initiatives aligned with those objectives for this school year (*What is the most strategic use of our resources to move us towards our goals?*)
2. ***A page detailing the strategic initiatives in each area for this school year*** with a greater context for the initiative and what the expected outcome and timeline for the initiative (*Why is this an important initiative and how will we know when it has been accomplished?*)

Following a final feedback period with the school community and external stakeholders, the strategic planning committee will present an updated draft of the strategic plan to the ANCS Governing Board no later than October 2015 for adoption.

The time and commitment of the strategic planning committee members during this process is greatly appreciated:

- Cheryl Booth – Faculty
- Susan Cannon – Faculty
- Elizabeth Hearn – Faculty
- Mary Campbell Jenkins – Board Member
- Kari Lovell – Staff
- Suzanne Mitchell – Board Member
- Michelle Newcome – Board Member & Committee Co-Chair
- Terry Roth – Parent
- Erik Speakman – Consultant
- Matt Underwood – Executive Director & Committee Co-Chair



2014-2017 STRATEGIC PLAN

VISION

To be a dynamic learning community where students become life-long learners, develop self-knowledge, and are challenged to excel.

MISSION

ANCS uses the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools to: **BUILD** an empowered and inclusive community of students, parents, and educators
ENGAGE the whole child—intellectually, social-emotionally, and physically
HELP all students to know themselves and to be known well by their community
CHALLENGE each student to take an active role as an informed citizen in a global society
COLLABORATE with the larger community to advocate for student-centered schools

Priority Goals

Teaching & Learning: To support academic, social-emotional, & physical growth of all students with high expectations for all, including exceeding external accountability standards.

Diversity: To build upon current diversity by creating proactive program to improve, retain, and realize benefits of student diversity that reflects socioeconomic and racial diversity of Jackson cluster.

Faculty & Staff Development: To be a school of choice for talented educators through competitive compensation, quality professional development, and emphasis on employee well-being.

Parent & Community Partnership: To strengthen the partnership between the school and its families and to engage the wider community—especially within APS—in partnerships for collaborative learning.

Fundraising & Resource Development: To strengthen fundraising infrastructure to expand and diversify sources of funding with a goal of 20% non-public funding and a reserve fund to weather funding drops.

Facilities & Operations: To plan for and implement facilities and technology improvements that result in consistency between campuses, enhanced school image, and promote sustainability.

Governance Capacity: To continue development of board capacity in strategic governance, resource development, and community outreach.

Three Year Objectives

1. Develop K-8 learning expectations & desired outcomes
2. Develop plan for enhancing arts, technology, language, & health/wellness
3. Establish student assessment system

1. Develop diversity plan for outreach & support
2. Address enrollment/retention obstacles for underserved families
3. Develop plan to maximize benefits of student diversity

1. Enhance recruitment with focus on diversity, excellence, and high potential
2. Strengthen levers for retention (compensation, support needs)
3. Enhance development opportunities

1. Enhance parent/school partnership
2. Strengthen ANCS/APS/Jackson cluster relationship
3. Institute collaborative learning center for outreach and dissemination to wider community

1. Increase parent giving to 100% participation
2. Enhance donor outreach, management, & recognition efforts
3. Establish reserve funds of at least \$1 million & policy for their use

1. Develop long-term facilities plan
2. Build facilities reserve fund
3. Implement multi-year technology plan
4. Implement "farm to school" program

1. Establish advisory council or add community members to board
2. Develop plan for ongoing governance training
3. Create metrics to assess board performance

Strategic Initiatives for 2014-15

1. Investigate IB authorization
2. Develop common K-8 grading practices
3. Determine student assessments
4. Map plan for phased class size reduction

1. Reinstitute staff diversity coordinator role to facilitate diversity taskforce
2. Work with GaDOE & APS to consider enrollment priority options

1. Configure calendar/schedule for collaboration & planning needs
2. Evaluate compensation structure
3. Implement TKES/LKES and assess impact

1. Establish collaborative guidelines for parent/school partnership
2. Develop initial plan for collaborative learning activities at ANCS via NTRP

1. Develop campaign to increase parent giving to at least 50% participation
2. Create major donor program
3. Develop external marketing materials

1. Create long-term facilities plan task force
2. Approve multi-year technology plan
3. Implement phase 1 MC projects
4. Implement "in-house" food service

1. Develop plan for enhanced board governance capacity (composition, training)
2. Assess High Bar membership impact on board performance



Teaching & Learning Initiatives for 2014-15

1. Investigate IB authorization: There are many similarities between the ANCS educational program and the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. At the same time, our neighborhood high school, Maynard Jackson High School (MJHS), has an IB diploma option. Therefore, in consideration of strengthening the educational outcomes for students while at ANCS and as they matriculate to high school, IB diploma option at MJHS, we will explore whether it would make sense for ANCS to become IB authorized.

Outcome: By February 2015, the IB exploratory task force chaired by Dr. Goodgame will bring a fully-vetted recommendation to the ANCS Governing Board as to whether ANCS should pursue IB authorization

2. Develop common K-8 grading practices: The development of common grading practices will help to align expectations about how we communicate across the school, with families, and with external audiences about student performance relative to standards

Outcome: By September 2014, faculty/staff will adopt common grading practices that reflect (1) the Coalition of Essential Schools common principles, (2) consistency across grade levels/campuses within developmental differences as appropriate, and (3) a need for clarity in communicating information to students and parents.

3. Determine system of internal & external assessments for program evaluation: As a school that emphasizes more than can be measured solely by a single standardized test, it is important that we have meaningful and reliable assessments of “the whole child”—academic, social-emotional, and physical. A holistic system of assessments will allow us to benchmark and set high expectations for all students.

Outcome: By January 2015, the leadership team will present to the board a system of student performance assessments to measure student progress across all domains. This presentation will include an explanation of each assessment tool (including the new Georgia Milestones tests), what it measures, initial benchmarks where possible, and any associated costs.

4. Map plan for phased class size reduction: Significant decreases in local and state funding from 2009-2013 led to an increase in class sizes across the school. Though funding has begun to increase again, returning to pre-2009 class sizes at our current funding would cost nearly \$1 million. Therefore, a plan for phased class size reduction must be developed to outline a realistic path for arriving at optimal class sizes.

Outcome: By March 2015, the leadership team will present to the board a plan for the phased reduction in class sizes across the school to support teaching and learning objectives and to align with budget priorities.



Diversity Initiatives for 2014-15

1. Reinstigate diversity coordinator role on staff to facilitate diversity taskforce: With achieving racial and socioeconomic diversity among the student population as a priority goal, we must recommit to a role on staff focused on helping orient the school towards the enrollment, support, and retention of a diverse student population. The first priority for this role would be to form a diversity taskforce of faculty and parents develop a plan for new student/family outreach.



Outcome: By October 2014, diversity coordinator will be named. By December 2014, diversity coordinator and taskforce will present to leadership team a plan for new student enrollment outreach that insures the school's enrollment process is well-publicized across the city and steps to mitigate barriers for families to enter into the enrollment process (language, lack of information, inability to attend information sessions, etc.).

2. Work with GaDOE and APS to consider enrollment priority options: Alongside a strengthened approach to new student/family outreach, a range of options will be discussed with the GaDOE and APS to increase the likelihood of a diverse student population, including weighted enrollment lottery or enrollment priority based on socioeconomic status. As a part of the charter renewal process, we will weigh these options.



Outcome: By June 2015, the ANCS board will approve as a part of the school's charter renewal petition an enrollment policy that (1) defines student enrollment diversity target and (2) a means to achieve that target in accordance with all applicable state and federal policies and regulations. Upon renewal of our charter, this policy would take effect with enrollment for the 2016-17 school year.



Faculty & Staff Development Initiatives for 2014-15

1. Configure calendar/schedule for collaboration and planning needs:

With the increasing demands of accountability and alignment of programs across campuses while serving a diverse student population, there is a need to shift the traditional school calendar and schedule to provide for greater time for faculty planning and collaboration in order to better serve students.



Outcome: By November 2014, leadership team will present a proposal to the ANCS Governing Board for recommended changes to the ANCS school calendar and schedule for the 2015-16 school year. The proposal will first undergo a period of review and feedback among parents and faculty/staff to be attuned to the needs of the full school community.

2. Evaluate compensation structure: For many years, our school has used the Atlanta Public Schools salary schedule as the basis for our own compensation structure. At this point in our school's development, this approach deserves fuller review to determine what changes might be needed so that compensation is considered alongside other mechanisms for attracting and retaining high-quality faculty and staff.



Outcome: By January 2015, a combined subgroup of the ANCS Governing Board's Finance/Operations and Personnel/Governance committees will present a report to the full board—including any recommendations for changes—regarding the school's compensation structure.

3. Implement TKES/LKES and assess impact: Changes in state law will require ANCS to use the state's teacher and school leader evaluation systems in the 2014-15 school year. We will implement TKES and LKES with fidelity to the requirements while attempting to emphasize the process as ones for supportive feedback. The impact of this new evaluation system on teachers and school leaders will be assessed by the Executive Director.



Outcome: By April 2015, the Executive Director will present to the board a report on the first full year of implementation of TKES and LKES and its overall effect on teachers and school leaders at both campuses with an emphasis on the quality of feedback delivered, impact on improving teaching and leading, and time spent on TKES/LKES implementation activities as compared to other professional activities.



Parent & Community Partnership Initiatives for 2014-15

1. Establish collaborative guidelines for parent/school partnership at ANCS:

The CES common principles include these statements:

- Decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff
- Parents should be key collaborators and vital members of the school community
- The school should...model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school.

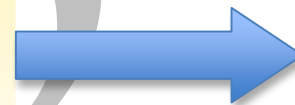
As our school has grown, there is a need for more formal guidance about what these principles look like in how parents and faculty/staff partner effectively in service to students—from engagement in the school life of an individual student to collective decision-making.



Outcome: By October 2014, leadership team and PTCA will jointly present to the school community guidelines for what the parent/school partnership at ANCS should look like—from an individual parent-teacher relationship to schoolwide practices.

2. Develop initial plan for collaborative learning activities facilitated by ANCS:

Our school is looked to as an example of what works in public education. As a charter school, we have an obligation to use this platform as a catalyst for creating collaborative learning opportunities that can transform classrooms and schools and influence larger discussions of teaching and learning in Atlanta and beyond, while at the same time providing leadership experiences for our most talented teachers and staff in their career development.



Outcome: By October 2014, the Executive Director and New Teacher Residency Project Director will present to the ANCS Governing Board an initial plan for collaborative learning activities facilitated by ANCS, which will include:

- Defining the specific activities, viability, and potential impact
- Process for determining who would carry out the work of these activities
- Sources of funding and partnership



Fundraising & Resource Development Initiatives for 2014-15

1. Develop a campaign to increase parent giving to at least 50% participation: Increased outreach to foundations has revealed that, in order to be more attractive to potential funders, our school must increase its level of parent participation in the ANCS Annual Campaign. We will focus efforts in this year's campaign to increase the percentage of parents giving from around 30% to at least 50%.



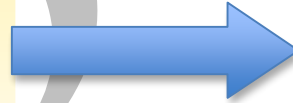
Outcome: By September 2014, the ANCS Annual Campaign will launch with an emphasis on increasing giving at any level from all parents. The campaign will feature mailings, phone solicitations, and small group sessions with parents from different grade levels to help educate parents about how ANCS is funded and its unique funding challenges as a charter school.

2. Create a major donor program: Within the ANCS community, there are individuals and families who are able to make contributions of at least \$1,000. The development of a major donor element to the ANCS Annual Campaign is crucial for sustainable funding for our school.



Outcome: By November 2014, the Executive Director and Fund Development Chair will present to the ANCS Governing Board a plan for a major donor program that focuses on donor management and recognition and the role of the ANCS business office to support such a program.

3. Develop external marketing materials: With a successful track record of achievement and organizational sustainability over more than 12 years, our school is poised to be of interest to external partners and funders. An external marketing campaign is needed to powerfully capture what makes ANCS unique and a strong investment for funders.

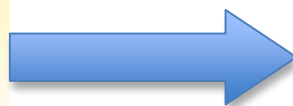


Outcome: By March 2015, an external marketing campaign will be developed (in print and other media) to highlight the successes of our school and identify important areas of investment of financial resources.



Facilities & Operations Initiatives for 2014-15

1. Create task force to develop long-term facilities plan: By refinancing our school’s Middle Campus facility and determined overall enrollment is not anticipated to increase above present levels, we have more certainty about working within our existing facilities. Clearly, there are facilities needs at both campuses which must be articulated and improvements planned.



Outcome: By April 2015, the Business & Operations office will oversee the completion of a facilities assessment, including existing needs and identifying potential upgrades and improvements. This assessment will include information gathered from students, faculty/staff, and parents.

2. Approve multi-year technology plan: As funding increases, our school is in a position to make new investments in technology. These investments should be guided by a plan that emphasizes the CES principle of personalization and collaboration so that technology purchases are driven by a goal of student learning.



Outcome: By October 2014, a multi-year technology plan will be presented to the ANCS Governing Board for adoption. The plan will include recommendations for equipment, systems, staffing, and ongoing maintenance and assessment of technology needs.

3. Implement phase 1 Middle Campus projects: Supported by a major grant from the Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta, ANCS will partner with Southface to implement energy-efficiency improvements at our school’s Middle Campus. These projects represent the first phase of facilities improvements with future projects to be outlined in the longer-term facilities plan.



Outcome: By December 2014, the projects targeted for implementation using the CFGA “Grants to Green” grant will be completed within budget.

4. Implement “in-house” food service: For the first time ever, ANCS will be running its entire food service in house without working with an outside vendor. With the hiring of a new school chef/nutrition director, this change holds the potential to result in a more efficient food service program that is focused on providing high-quality meals and making the school kitchen a place for learning.



Outcome: Beginning in October 2014, the Executive Director and Director of Business & Operations will provide quarterly reports to the board about the implementation of food service program changes with data on program participation among students and faculty/staff, financials, and compliance.



Governance Capacity Initiatives for 2014-15

1. Develop plan for enhanced board governance capacity: In year 13 of our school’s existence, the role of the governing board has evolved and matured. We now need to articulate a plan to enhance the capacity of the board to sustain a focus on governance, fundraising, and advocacy through changes in board membership in order to carry out the mission of the school.



Outcome: By February 2015, the Governance Committee of the ANCS Governing Board will present to the full board recommendations for enhancing board governance capacity, including training, board composition, and role of community members who are not ANCS parents in the governance structure.

2. Assess High Bar membership impact on board performance: The ANCS Governing Board has joined the High Bar, the premier resource for charter school governance support. Our board will take full advantage of this membership and determine what impact it has on the ability of the board to work effectively and efficiently.



Outcome: By June 2015, the ANCS Governing Board will take part in a collective assessment of High Bar membership and its impact prior to making a decision about renewing membership for the following school year.

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