

Westside Atlanta Charter School  
Strategic Planning Annual Update  
April 5, 2016

*On March 19th, the Westside Atlanta Charter School (“WACS”) Governing Board met to conduct the Strategic Planning Annual Update Retreat. At the Retreat, the WACS Governing Board reviewed their first and second years’ progress on goals, initiatives, and the overall strategic direction of both the Board and WACS in a session facilitated by policy consultant Laura Lashley. Additionally, new strategies and initiatives were discussed for inclusion in the WACS strategic plan at this pivotal point in their initial charter term. Findings from the March 19th session follow:*

**Preparation:**

The WACS Governing Board prepared for the strategic planning retreat by completing a survey designed to help prioritize issues currently facing the school during the March 19<sup>th</sup> retreat. The survey read as follows:

**Issue Identification.** In order to focus our limited and valuable time together efficiently, please review the list of issues identified last year and determine the level of attention they require during the strategic planning retreat. Only issues with high or medium priority will be added to the discussion agenda for Saturday. Please add any new issues in the "Other" box below.

**Status of Issue:**

Designate issues as “Needs Attention” when:

- No tactics currently exist to address that issue, and the issue is important or escalating in importance; OR
- Currently employed tactics are not yielding desired results, and the issue is important or escalating in importance.

Designate issues as “Mid-Intervention” when the issue has been explored, and tactics have been employed.

Designate issues as “Resolved” when:

- An issue has been identified, vetted, explored, and tactics have been employed successfully. The issue no longer presents challenges or difficulty to the organization and is either completely resolved or in a stable maintenance mode; OR
- The timeframe for the issue has passed, and the issue no longer presents a challenge or difficulty to the organization.

**Priority for Discussion:** Saturday’s retreat will focus on those topics designated as “High” priority first. Issues designated as “Mid-Intervention” should only be addressed as High Priority for discussion if data is available for discussion on the efficacy of those tactics or there are important new developments for consideration.

Issue	Status of Issue (Needs Attention, Mid-Intervention, Resolved)	Priority for Discussion (Low, Medium, High)	Discussed at Retreat?
Facility (short-term)	Mid-Intervention to Resolved	Low	No
Facility (permanent location)	Needs Intervention to Mid-Intervention	High	Yes
Strategic Board Vacancy Recruitment	Needs Intervention	Medium	Yes
Development of key community partnerships	Mid-intervention	Low	No
WACS enrollment	Resolved	Low	No
Development of WACS educational brand (student-centered learning, design thinking, leadership principles)	Mid-Intervention	Low	No
Transitional student population achievement	Mid-Intervention	Low	No
Maintaining and/or increasing student diversity	Resolved	Low	No

Service to Gifted Student Population	Resolved	Low	No
Achievement gap for incoming kindergarteners	Mid-Intervention	Medium	No
Fundraising efforts	Needs Attention	High	Yes
Balanced School Calendar (addressing implementation issues effectively)	Resolved	Low	No
Preparation for charter renewal	Mid-Intervention	Medium	Yes
Relationship with APS as authorizer	Resolved	Low	No
Effective board committees	Mid-Intervention	Low	Yes
ADD IN: Transitioning students to middle grades and impacts on WACS upper classes	Needs Attention	Medium	Yes

**Governance Reflection:**

After reviewing the norms and group expectations for the strategic planning update session, the WACS Governing Board engaged in a governance reflection activity to discuss the Governing Board’s performance, efficiency, and areas for growth. This discussion was effectuated by reviewing highlighted goals for specific areas of governance and corresponding strategies and initiatives from the initial strategic planning report.

**Area:** Relationship with Authorizer

*First Year Goal:* Build a strong relationship with APS at multiple levels throughout the organization.

*Overall Goal Status:* Successful, In Progress.

*Identified Tactic:* Begin planning a Welcome New APS Board Members Day at WACS to introduce the new APS board members to the WACS community, student body, and mission. Notify media to increase WACS’s presence in the greater Atlanta community.

- Timeline: Prior to the end of the 2013-2014 school year
- Status: Accomplished. The APS charter division team visited WACS as well as three APS Board Members (Grant, Westmoreland, English) in April/May of 2014. Dr. Carstarphen additionally visited in October of 2014.

*Identified Tactic:* Keep Allen Mueller and other APS charter officials informed as to WACS long and short term plans for the school.

- Timeline: Ongoing throughout charter term
- Oversight/Responsible Party: Communication will be made by WACS Principal and WACS Board Chair
- Status: Accomplished, requires ongoing effort. Gayle Burnett, the new Director of Innovation for APS and Mr. Mueller’s successor, visited a WACS Board meeting in order to discuss renewal efforts and general charter school issues. Going forward, WACS will ensure that Ms. Burnett remains up to date on WACS initiatives, including facility planning and interest in potential school sites.

*Second Year Update:* WACS staff continues to report a strong, responsive relationship with its authorizer, Atlanta Public Schools (“APS”), as well as members of the new APS Board of Education and Superintendent, Dr. Carstarphen.

*Third Year Update:* The WACS Governing Board discussed both the Board and Principal Settlemayer’s ongoing relationships with APS, the neighborhood cluster, and the overall community favorably.

**Area:** Governance

*First Year Goal:* The WACS Governing Board will transition from a founding board to a highly functioning, highly productive governing board.

*First Year: Area for Improvement:* Better communication between board members and board committees

*Identified Tactic:* Within two days of a board committee meeting, the committee chair will email a brief meeting summary to the rest of the board, with copies sent to the rest of the committee, the principal, and related staff.

- Timeline: Effective immediately.
- Status: Implemented.

*Identified Tactic:* Circulate information about important issues requiring debate at full board meetings via email to board, principal, and related staff in advance of the meeting to allow for a meaningful board discussion.

- Timeline: Effective immediately.
- Status: Implemented.
- Notes: The Board discussed the prospective need for clear communication up front regarding which emails required responses and which were only for information purposes.

*Identified Tactic:* Transition WACS Board Chair from membership on facilities/finance committee over next six months through strategic board vacancy recruitment to enable Board Chair to play the role of facilitator for board communication.

- Timeline: Over five-six months.
- Status: Effectively implemented.
- Notes: The WACS Board Chair remains involved on the facilities/finance committee but has been able to delegate more tasks and authority to other committee members due to strategic board vacancy recruitment efforts. This tactic is considered accomplished.

*Identified Tactic:* Formalize a new board member orientation process along with establishment of board member mentors to new members.

- Timeline: Prior to new board members joining.
- Status: Implemented. The Governance Committee noted the need for external training and additional support on governance tasks to enable additional board member development and growth in governance expertise.
- Third Year Update: The Board agreed that new or prospective board members should be invited to attend a board meeting prior to joining and/or a board social event as part of new member orientation.

*First Year: Area for Improvement:* Define the roles of board committees to increase efficacy and focus efforts

*Identified Tactic:* Use time at the Year One Strategic Planning Retreat to define the short-term missions of the Education Committee, the Development Committee, and the Outreach Committee.

- Timeline: Immediately.
- Status: Accomplished.

*Identified Tactic (Year Two):* The Governance Committee will present and the Board will discuss and adopt a refined committee structure to better facilitate the work of the board committees.

- Timeline: Immediately.
- Status: In progress.

- Notes: The proposed committee restructuring would merge the work of several smaller committees into two larger committees due to overlap and uneven distribution of work. For example, the Finance, Facilities, and Development would merge into one committee, with the remaining committees merging together for the second committee.

*Identified Tactic (Year Three):* Provide an on-boarding process for new committee members that do not currently sit on the WACS Governing Board to ensure that Board expectations for good governance carry through to the committee level.

- Timeline: Immediately.
- Notes: The Governance Committee will create an on-boarding process that may consist of a statement of priorities, intent, and norms for new committee members to affirm. The Governance Committee will also consider drafting a committee membership policy that would include the on-boarding process for Board consideration/adoption.

*First Year: Area for Improvement:* Maximize productivity at meetings.

*Identified Tactic:* Start on time as soon as a quorum is present.

- Timeline: effective immediately.
- Status: Accomplished. Ongoing maintenance required.

*Identified Tactic:* Circulate information about important issues requiring debate at full board meetings via email to board, principal, and related staff in advance of the meeting to allow for a meaningful board discussion.

- Timeline: Effective immediately.
- Status: Accomplished.
- Notes: The Board discussed the prospective need for clear communication up front regarding which emails required responses and which were only for information purposes.

*Identified Tactic:* Provide detailed budget report in advance of meetings, but focus meeting presentation on up and coming issues, any changes since the last meeting, and a quick snapshot of the budget at present.

- Timeline: Effective immediately.
- Status: Accomplished.

*Identified Tactic:* Committees and board members promptly report items for the agenda's creation regularly via email to WACS Vice Chair.

- Timeline for implementation: effective immediately.
- Status: Accomplished.

*Identified Tactic (Year Three):* The Governance Committee will create and maintain a Board calendar to notify board members and their stakeholders of expiring terms for directors and Board officers.

- Timeline: Before summer.
- Status: In progress.

*Second Year: Area for Improvement:* Meetings often run over the end times.

*Identified Tactic:* Stick to the Agenda, fully delegate tasks to assigned and responsible committees, and plan for longer meetings when discussion is expected and necessary.

- Timeline: Immediately.
- Status: Accomplished.

*Second Year Update:* The WACS Governing Board acknowledges that this is an ongoing endeavor but that the board has made substantial progress through the use of the identified tactics in the Year One Strategic Planning Report.

*Third Year Update:* The WACS Governing Board reported that meetings run smoothly according to the agenda within allotted times. The Board discussed the strengths and areas for attention having a parent-majority on the Board may create but noted that current board members appropriately represent all students and all grades. The Board discussed needing additional clarity for the function of the Education Committee, but that this committee could be utilized during the charter renewal process.

#### Issue/Goal Identification:

After concluding the reflection on governance, the WACS Governing Board discussed the implementation and progress on the goals identified in the first year of the strategic planning process. The Board then moved on to set new goals, strategies, and tactics in key growth areas by the priority established in the preparation activity.

#### **Area:** Fundraising Practices

*First Year Goal:* The WACS Governing Board will develop fundraising practices to support school growth and facility expansion.

*Status:* In progress

*Notes:* Fundraising for facility growth and expansion was a primary topic of discussion for the Year One Strategic Planning Retreat. The WACS Governing Board discussed at a high level its progress towards implementation of highly effective fundraising practices. The Board reported that the general fund for the school was in good shape, but that more extensive fundraising efforts to support facility growth and expansion should be placed on hold until facility plans were solidified. In the interim, the Board identified several tactics to prepare for the extensive fundraising efforts necessary later on.

*Identified Tactic (Second Year):* Retain marketing expertise and consultation to build out a strategic marketing plan for WACS.

- Timeline: Immediately
- Status: In progress. The Board will be meeting with a parent with marketing expertise in the April/May 2015 timeframe to discuss high level plans for a marketing campaign that will ultimately be used to support fundraising efforts for facility growth and expansion.
- Notes: Goals for Marketing Plan to Benefit WACS:
  - o Social Media Outreach (big with parents and students)
  - o Refining School Identity/Brand
  - o Teacher/Board Member/Family Recruitment
  - o Pictures of school community for website, general use
  - o Student vignettes
  - o Connect with Mount Vernon to discuss their marketing plan
- Third Year Update: This tactic has not yet been completed.

*Identified Tactic (Second Year):* Create a one-page document with WACS information to use in the interim.

- Timeline: Immediately (Prior to Summer 2015).
- Responsible Party: Monica.
- Third Year Update: This tactic has not yet been completed.

*Identified Tactic (Second Year):* Create a WACS Advisory Board to offer strategic support and guidance.

- Timeline: Immediately begin set-up process with plan to implement Fall of 2015
- Notes: The WACS Board determined that the Advisory Board's focus should be on Innovation, Community Engagement, and Capital Development. The Board also discussed the need for additional support and guidance from the community in a broad array of areas:
  - o New board member recruitment/development
  - o Exiting board member involvement and engagement
  - o Brainstorming for Community/School Initiatives
  - o Fundraising
  - o Networking
  - o Increasing WACS Presence
  - o Increasing Public Knowledge about Charter Schools
  - o Leadership Opportunities for Community Partners
  - o Reflective of Community Diversity
- Third Year Update: This tactic's implementation stalled during 2015 due to the facilities work taking priority for involved Board members. The WACS Governing Board recommitted to this tactic with the goal of establishing both a ramp-up plan for an advisory board as a first step, with the advisory board meeting for the first time in the fall of 2016.

*Identified Tactic (Year Three):* Create a Fundraising/Development Committee to head up the Advisory Board creation process and later, the Capital Campaign as well as developing a culture of institutional giving in the school community.

- Steps/Timeline:
  - o Create Fundraising/Development Committee.
    - *Completed at retreat:* Chuck, Monica, and Katrina.
  - o Fundraising/Development Committee will establish a ramp-up plan for the advisory board.
    - Prior to summer, preferably by the end of May.
  - o Formation of Advisory Board
    - Recruitment will occur over the summer with the goal of having a complete advisory board August 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - o First Advisory Board Meeting
    - The first meeting should be tentatively scheduled as a Back-to-School event for the August-September timeframe.
- Notes: The feasibility study should be complete in time for use with the new advisory board. The Board discussed having two meetings a year for the advisory board. The Board expressed a desire for annual fundraising events such as Grandparents Day. The Board also stated an intent to poll parents to learn where WACS parents worked as potential sources of fundraising.

**Area:** Facilities Expansion

*First Year Goal:* The WACS Governing Board will develop both a short term and long term plan to secure appropriate facilities to house the school.

*Status:* In progress

*Notes:* The WACS Governing Board discussed the timeline and planning for the short term/long term/permanent facility expansion.

*Identified Tactic:* Identify and weigh all facility options and solidify facility expansion plans.

- Timeline: Finalize facility expansion plans by September of 2015
- Status: In progress.
- Notes: The WACS Board discussed the current options for facility expansion and requested the Board consider forming “guardrails” to help the Finance Committee weigh the options. The Board determined that proximity to current location is the number one most important aspect for the facilities planning, with cost being a close second. Other important aspects include: timing, control over property, and breadth of endeavor (fundraising likely to be more substantial for larger projects).
- Third Year Update: Facility expansion plans and initial timeframes were extended out of necessity and ancillary issues.

*Identified Tactic:* Delegate facility expansion planning to Facilities Committee, with regular updates to WACS Board.

- Timeline: Immediately.
- Status: In progress.
- Notes: In order to keep WACS Board productivity high, the Facilities Committee needs to be trusted to handle process and keep the board regularly informed.
- Third Year Update: Delegation has been accomplished, but some board members expressed a desire to know the wish list for building attributes prior to major decisions being made.

*Identified Tactic (Year Three):* The Facility Committee and Principal Settlemayer will prepare information for the Board on the wish list for building attributes and priorities, how building attributes will be prioritized and chosen going forward, a plan for involving stakeholders, and a timeline for when other options will need to be explored.

- Timeline: Wish list will be presented at April 14, 2016 meeting. The rest of the information will be presented by the June-July timeframe.
- Status: Beginning.

## **Area:** Community Engagement

*First Year Goal:* WACS will engage fully with its community to maximize opportunities for students and make meaningful contributions to the city of Atlanta.

*Status:* In progress

*Notes:* The WACS Governing Board identified meaningful community engagement and partnership as a goal in their Year One Strategic Planning Report. In the Year Two Update session, the WACS Board revisited the progress of Year One tactics and identified new ways to engage the community.

*Identified Tactic:* Grow the Partnership with the Rollins Center to provide language/literacy supports to students in K-3.

- Timeline: Over the course of the charter term.
- Status: In progress.
- Notes: WACS staff is currently working with three area schools to create language/literacy lab classrooms. WACS is working to provide additional facilitators to expand this partnership with the Douglass cluster in APS and is partnering with the APS Office of Innovation to secure external grant funding to support this work. WACS is also working towards developing and hosting a summer language/literacy institute.
- Third Year Update: Accomplished.

*Identified Tactic:* Create a WACS Advisory Board to offer strategic support and guidance. See above for additional details.

**Area:** Board Member Recruitment

*First Year Goal:* Fill board vacancies strategically with dedicated individuals that bring needed experience, skillsets, and connections to maximize support of the school.

*Status:* Ongoing

*Notes:* While the WACS Board does not currently have any vacancies, the WACS Board anticipates that one or more current members may roll off the Governing Board to lead the creation and efforts of the new WACS Advisory Board. As such, the WACS Board identified some desired skillsets for prospective WACS Board members.

*Identified Qualifications:*

- Legal or Governance experience to help Board improve governance and prepare for charter renewal
- Marketing or Public Relations experience
- Connections to the community
- Reflective of community's diversity

*Third Year Update:* The WACS Governing Board would like to increase membership from 10 members to 12 members with an eye towards building a more diverse board.

- Timeline: Increase to 12 to occur by August 1<sup>st</sup>, with preference for April-May for the development-focused board member.
- Notes: The preferred skillsets of the new board members would include knowledge in facilities and fundraising/development practices with solid connections in the community.

**Area:** Charter Renewal

*Second Year Goal:* Begin preparation for seeking charter renewal.

*Notes:* While still a few years out, the WACS Board decided to discuss certain school issues that will be important to have fully vetted prior to submitting a renewal application.

*Identified Tactic (Year Two):* Invite Charter Division Director Gayle Burnett to speak at WACS Board meeting about charter renewal.

- Timeline: March 2015.
- Status: Accomplished.
- Notes: There was some confusion regarding whether renewal petitions are submitted in year 3 or year 4 of the charter term. The WACS Board will receive feedback on this question from consultant Laura Lashley.

*Identified Tactic (Year Two):* Determine whether to implement the balanced calendar approach as described in the initial WACS petition.

- Timeline: Spring 2015.
- Status: In progress.
- Notes: The WACS Governing Board established a committee to investigate whether to implement the balanced calendar approach or strike it from the WACS educational model.
- Third Year Update: Resolved.

*Identified Tactic (Year Two):* Determine the ultimate enrollment growth desired for WACS. Weigh options of small school vs. small classrooms.



- Timeline: 2015-2016 school year.
- Status: Beginning.
- Notes: The WACS Board determined more research and discussion is necessary to determine whether WACS should strive for smaller classrooms or school size.
- Third Year Update: The Board revisited this discussion and determined that it should be brought to the Community Council for input and consideration. The Board also decided that it was not a pressing issue in the school's first charter term, but that it would be of greater importance as it started its second term.

*Identified Tactic (Year Three):* Gather information from the school community to gauge whether potential attrition for middle school grades may occur. Utilize this information to strengthen WACS programmatic offerings to incentivize families to keep students in WACS through grade 8.

- Timeline: Initial communication to families prior to end of 2015-2016 school year.
- Notes: The Teacher in Residence and WACS staff will lead the implementation of this tactic. The Board intends for both an initial questionnaire and a gathering of affected grades to be part of this strategy. Potential additions to this strategy could include increased collaboration and relationship building with local high schools, a marketing push to families on WACS' small school offerings and strengths, and a plan to maintain diversity in upper grades should attrition occur.

*Identified Tactic (Year Three):* The Governance Committee will revisit the board's by-laws and policies and bring recommended changes to the WACS Governing Board for their consideration as part of the overall preparation for the charter renewal process.

- Timeline: To be completed prior to applying for charter renewal.
- Status: Beginning.

*Identified Tactic (Year Three):* The Education/Charter Renewal Committee will begin work on identifying issues, potential problems, and remediation areas with WACS Staff to begin preparation for charter renewal.

- Timeline: April-October timeframe.
- Status: Beginning.

**Adoption Note:**

- The achievement gap for incoming kindergartners (i.e. pre-k) is the only medium or higher priority item not addressed in this year's Strategic Planning session. The board has requested that the charter renewal committee consider this item as part of their renewal petition work.