



Equity for All 2025 - Feedback Received

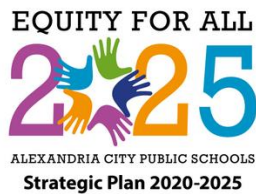
Feedback received from Strategic Planning Committee

1. One thing I feel is missing is any reference to the COVID pandemic. It feels odd not to reference it in some way since what ACPS will look like going forward is different from what we expected it would when the plan was developed. In fact, the pandemic has shone a bright spotlight on the inequities that exist, underscoring the importance of an equity framework. (5/22/2020)

Feedback Received from Staff

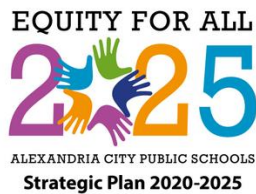
2. I am so proud to stand behind this strategic plan. I read the entire document this morning and it was the best thing to wake up to. I've dedicated my work to immigrant families and English learners, and have sought ways to increase equity for all students, and particularly those who have been most marginalized. This plan is so empowering for me to continue fighting the good fight - it is exactly what we need to ensure the larger ecosystem of Alexandria is cared for. I have no doubt that this plan will work to achieve equity for this community.
3. This plan was so impressive. I love the commitment to equity across the board in the plan. As a TAG teacher, the commitment to equity in TAG programming is something that is desperately needed and I was so glad to see that it is being addressed districtwide. I am looking forward to seeing a more diverse group of students in TAG classes so that the diverse populations at our schools are reflected in TAG classrooms. I worry that the pandemic is going to negatively impact our Young Scholars and I hope that schools can develop plans to try to insure that this doesn't happen. I am proud to be a teacher in a district with a passion for equity, which is a passion I share.
4. The plan looks well laid out and built upon a foundation of five key goals.
5. No comments
6. A big strength is focusing on EL family engagement, as immigrant families are often unfamiliar with the expectations and structures of school, which translates into less advocacy for their students. I am also heartened to see there is a focus on hiring more multilingual staff. As a white man, I often do not know how a student from Central America might view a topic in economics or history when the lived experiences of my students is typically so different from my own. Making connections to students lives has been documented many times as a best practice for teaching multilingual learners, and my practice would benefit from more immigrant colleagues. To that same point - and to paraphrase a researcher - the presence of ELs in the classroom should change WHAT is being taught in addition to HOW it is being taught. The focus on "best practices" for ELs seems narrow and we should consider how the curriculum can offer or deny opportunities for content learning and language development.
7. There are several things we could do right away to achieve more equity in ACPS. The first thing I think we should do is to systemically rethink TAG. All students are talented and gifted and we need to reallocate those funds and resources to use TAG teachers to do specialized project-based learning with all students. We could use some kind of survey to find out students' interests and create curriculum so all have access to high-level, critical thinking activities without the promotion of de facto segregation as it exists now. The

As of 06/22/2020



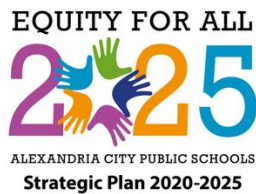
second thing is to use more authentic assessments to guide our data analysis, which would include more performance-based assessments. Standardized tests, MAP and CO benchmark testing take away from classroom instruction and have promoted the use of classroom instruction time to "drill and kill" students at the expense of other subject matters being taught like social studies and writing (at least at the elementary level). Finally pair LC with JH.

8. Science should also be listed under "Measuring Our Impact." Within the two most recent school years (2019-2021), three of our 14 elementary schools have been monitored by VDOE for accreditation due to low performance in science. Two of these schools had oversight only for science (not math or reading). Our elementary schools have accreditation issues when science is not prioritized along with reading and math.
9. The draft strategic plan seems to be thoughtful and explicit. I am interested to see how it is implemented and what that looks like related to the current SOLs that aren't necessarily inclusive or equitable for all students. I would also like to see what professional development will look like as it relates to equity and culturally relevant teaching/pedagogy, and how all teachers, coaches, principals/administration etc. will be held accountable.
10. The strategic plan seems to be a solid framework to meet the goals that are outlined. The measures and strategies in the plan should help the division, administrators, faculty, and staff achieve the goals. In order to achieve these goals it will be critical for all stakeholders to have input on the specific needs that will help them in their unique roles. Members of the staff who help determine the strategies that will be used and how implementation will be measured need to collaborate at the school level to share the needs and concerns of the faculty, staff, students, and families. Professional development must be consistent and directly related to the components of the plan as it relates to faculty and staff in their specific roles.
11. I think that this plan is AMAZING! I think that it is well put together and thought out. I want to thank the team as I believe it truly covers all areas of student need.
12. I am excited for the students, families and community. The plan is relevant, reasonable and achievable through the measures outlined in the five goals with student outcomes at the center.
13. It's a lot of words. So wordy. These are reasonable goals but they are generically worded to the point that they could encompass almost any type/degree of measurement to say that the goal has been achieved. I understand that specific, concrete measurements are not part of such a goal-oriented document.
14. Career and Technical Education Programs should be included in any coordination/delivery of career development, training, pre/post military training, etc., work-based learning partners; community job partners. CTE programs deliver and support advanced education, training as well as certifications. I did not see where this was included considering federal funds are directly tied to CTE programs. CTE is a major component in the state and across the US.
15. Thank you for allowing me to give feed back regarding the five core values that will be implemented. I believe these changes and guidelines will help us to become better educators and with this plan will help us to make changes with ourselves to help us listen to the needs of all students. To provide guidance that will help the parents help their children understand the five core values to help shape this nation and the world. It hurts but we need more teachers of color and role models. As a young girl I was told that I would build bridges between races and I have walked in that gift to show kindness, peace and love that our



children would see a example of how we should treat each other. I will never giving up on supporting our teacher, our staff members, especially our paraprofessional and special need teams. ACPS THANKS FOR WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE! .We can and will change! I am retiring this year and wish you all the best! Lets move forward and succeed.

16. Felicitarles a los maestros por el excelente trabajo educativo y apoyo a todos los padres de familia y proteger a nuestros hijos en esta pandemia del covi19
(TRANSLATION: Congratulations to the teachers for their excellent educational work and support to all of the parents and families and for the protection for our children in this pandemic COVID-19)
17. ACPS schools should be trauma-sensitive schools. Trauma has a profound impact on brain-function and consequently the ability to learn. Focus on trauma and your school system becomes more equitable. This strategic plan is VERY HEAVY on jargon and is very verbose. Makes it excruciating to read. Somewhere, the focus should be overtly STUDENT-CENTERED and not put the needs of the central office monitoring ahead of student needs. For too long, education systems focus on the survival of the support system--Not the student. For example, decisions were made about delivering special needs services by the central office to my son with no regard what he needed. The principal was well aware of my sons needs, as well as the entire team. Yet the Central Office routinely the needs of the central office came first. -Give principals control over maintenance of their own schools. GW Middle School problems could be fixed anywhere but here. It is almost criminal how mold problem was ignored.
18. Attached are my comments on the draft 2025 Strategic Plan.
 1. Excerpt from the plan:
 - OUR VISION: EMPOWERING ALL STUDENTS TO THRIVE IN A DIVERSE AND EVER-CHANGING WORLD
 - Comment: The Global Education Initiative we are developing appears to be a direct response to 2025 Strategic Plan vision
 2. Excerpt from the plan:
 - 4. The Division-wide areas of focus for the 2020-25 school years are likely to include:
 - • Multiple pathways to high school diploma and beyond
 - Question
 - Does this also mean multidisciplinary studies?
 3. Observation/ Comment
 - The “Strategies and Highlighted Actions” include a mix of organizational and programmatic strategies. If there are refinements to the plan, it might help to group them by category.
 - Also, there is some overlap and consistency with comments from the EDT and Educational research panel as well; some coordination will likely be enriching to both processes.
 4. Excerpt from the plan
 - Implement the High School Project.
 - • Study the demand for and feasibility of adding Amharic and Arabic language classes
 - Question: Was this action intentionally grouped with The High School Project?
 5. Observation Comment



- STEM/ STEAM, CTE and Project Based Learning were identified as educational programming focus areas by the EDT on The High School project. How are these focus areas considered in the plan?
6. Observation/ Comment
- Except for a broad imperative to implement The High School project. I did not see specific metrics related to the project's implementation. Some goals The High School project will seek to meet have to do with sustainability. Is it appropriate to recognize goals like this in the strategic plan?

Feedback received via e-mails to the School Board

19. Hey, I thought it was okay. There's a lot of jargon. I asked myself a few times what does this mean, what are they saying? I don't see the focus on equity. I think this is a plan to improve business operations of ACPS, but what are the measures that are being used? How is success identified? Where is the quantitative data? Lots of surveys. Also, there's absence of community. Family and community engagement is a goal area, but I don't see anything that references community. I don't feel as though ACPS engages the community. I only know what happens with schools because of Chris and now you and I'm going to have a kid there soon.

Here's some other notes.

Slide 2 > - The equity statement is throwing me off. I don't think saying remove barriers is realistic, especially with the limited partners (students, families, faculty). Also achieving aspirations? Seems so vague. Not sure what this is trying to say.

Slide 6 > - Who does the survey go to? Just make sure there's appropriate representation from minority groups

Slide 8 > - Does ACPS provide high-quality instruction to some students and not all? If so, there's a deeper issue that should be addressed. If access is similar to students being able to take honors classes and others not, you may want to have a survey for the parents. Do the parents know about the educational opportunities available to their child?

Slide 9 > - What only K-2 classrooms? Why not K-5?

Slide 12 > - What does equitably mean here? Serving the highest need schools first?

Slide 13 > - Why only the first few years? Teachers need support throughout their career I assume
(6/9/2020)

20. I really appreciate having the opportunity to submit feedback on the ACPS strategic plan.

The truth of the matter is that this plan is written by and for people who are up to their necks in education policy! It reads to me like many very thoughtful people went through and added a lot of language to make sure to hit every point, making it a lot less readable for those of us without a degree in education! And I'd expect nothing less from people who care so much about how this plan extends forward into our kids' futures!

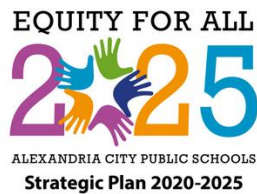
There are a few things I expected to see in this plan that we're missing—and I'm not sure if that's because the strategic plan is not the place to lay them out, if the stakeholders couldn't come to a consensus on them, or if their omission was inadvertent:



1. Distance Learning: Every congregation of people I am a member of has, in the past month or so, acknowledged that virtual gathering is here to stay, in one form or another. Synagogues are planning virtual High Holiday services in the fall, political parties are organizing vote by mail campaigns to keep people from gathering in large groups in November. Although obviously not within the original scope of the five-year strategic plan, it seems like creating a plan for off-and-on virtual learning may be in order.
2. Gun violence prevention: I, and other parents, while currently preoccupied with two other pressing pandemics, am pretty concerned about the gun violence epidemic as it pertains to the hearts, minds, and bodies of our children and educators. Are we sticking with ALICE? Are we discussing ending active shooter drills? Did we ever make sure that APD and the Sheriff Lawhorne's office had more than just a small handful of officers trained on our protocols? (I continue to grow more and more concerned for students and teachers and staff members of color who may be perceived as a threat, running from a school building during an active shooter situation. When I asked that question at a PTA meeting visited by [ACPS Staff Member], his answer was something in the lines of, "if you don't think we can tell the difference between a fifth grader and a real threat..." and I would respectfully ask that he direct that comment to the family of Tamir Rice.)
3. SROs and counselors in our schools: Whether it's a beloved officer accidentally discharging his weapon through the wall of his office or the shameful and humiliating racial profiling of my friend [NAME REDACTED]'s son at TC Williams last year, I question the need for law enforcement in Alexandria City Public Schools. I can't help but wonder if this strategic plan ought to address what policing our children looks like five years from now. Similarly, I question the very low number of counselors and social workers in our schools, elementary through high. We know that PBIS works, at least at the elementary school level. It seems that allocating funding toward law enforcement, when it could be used on counselors and social workers, is something worth addressing in this plan.

I'd like to express my support for one broad point, and then ask for two things related to it: I have never seen the word EQUITY written out in one place as many times as in this presentation! And rightly so! I am really proud to be part of a school community—and to have city leadership—that is acknowledging the need to allocate our resources in an equitable way. Thank you! Here are my two thoughts on that, a white woman speaking from an acknowledged place of privilege.

1. TAG I, like you, share the grave concern that we are not identifying non-white and ESL students for the TAG services they need and deserve. I am also concerned that all students, including my white male children, are receiving TAG services that are far more diluted and differentiated than they should be. Just like children who need extra accommodations to catch up, many TAG kids need enrichment to stay engaged, maintain self-esteem, and learn resilience. In the 2018–2019 school year, my child's 4th grade TAG Reading class, taught by a second-year teacher, had 35 children in it — more kids than chairs. That means that, although only 10% of kids nationally qualify, 33–35% of his grade level at Charles Barrett Elementary qualified for TAG services. And it's not because we have done such a stellar job lifting up previously unidentified TAG kids of color.



It's because we have too many white parents insisting that their children receive TAG services unnecessarily.

Until our policies empower administrators to tell white parents NO, we can't possibly fix the proportionality problem in our talented and gifted classes. Allowing white families to hoard resources does a disservice to us all, diluting our TAG curriculum and forcing teachers to differentiate far too much for such a specialized program. It's not enough to test equitably—we need to administer services equitably, too— which, in addition to telling more people YES, also means telling more people NO. So, as this plan certainly screams that equity is at the top of our city's priority list, I wonder how we will become more equitable if we continue to tiptoe around our white families knowingly or unknowingly contributing to less than equitable distribution of resources.

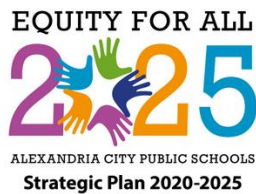
2. Tell us what you need from us, specifically. Like most communication I get from ACPS, the strategic plan covers the entire system, from pre-K–12. I understand that this document is meant to be an umbrella, a snapshot of principles guiding decision-making across all levels of education. However, from the perspective of a parent, it is incredibly rare that an email sent to the entire community can or should be read the same way by pre-K families and 12th grade families alike.

Making sure all of these communications and plans pertain to everyone, in my opinion, winds up leaving people out and fracturing the community along the line of age when disagreements arise. A perfect example (that I know you will cringe at) is the first email about summer school. Many high school parents and teachers were thrilled to find out that there was mandatory schoolwork ahead of them—while many early elementary parents were shocked, as the Venn diagram of our varied experiences with zoom learning all overlap at “not age-appropriate.”

This leads me to my final thought on “tell me what you need from me,” as it pertains to equity. I am guilty of buying into and perpetuating the idea that there's a vast, unrepresented and largely unheard constituency of struggling Black and brown ACPS families—and then there are some very rich, white, very vocal families (PTA moms, never dads, in particular), who get outsized attention and create immeasurable work for school staff, central office, and administration, to everyone else's detriment. Honestly, I don't even know if you think I fall into the latter category, or if I am even self-aware enough to know if it's true.

I would like to make it very clear that there is also a large constituency of privileged parents who want to do the right thing, at any cost. We need leadership in guidance to help us tease out how we can best be useful, or at least not burdensome, as the city pursues equity. We need help identifying the line between getting our children what they need and preventing someone else from doing the same. When is it a zero sum game, and when is there enough for everyone?

When that first summer school email came out, there was a huge round of fingerpointing and cloud of confusion online. As a privileged, white family whose children are desperate for enrichment, but don't need intervention, am I being a team player by NOT opting out of summer school? Do central office and my school staff want more kids on the Zoom calls? Or, by taking a piece of the pie, is our participation in summer learning unhelpful—are we taking services we don't need, when students who have fallen behind could use a higher percentage of the teacher's time?



I know, I know: how does central office communicate with parents in a sensitive, polite way that makes clear what is needed from whom and who is best served with the services offered? I think the answer is that central office has to have a little faith. We can be spoken to, adult to adult. All of these communications seem to be designed to avoid a title wave of nasty emails from the vocal/rich/white parents, while being inclusive of parents in underserved communities.

Maybe I'm answering my own question—maybe the point is that my family just needs to delete the emails and scroll on by. But we would like to be helpful and productive as part of our city's effort to become a more equitable place for students to learn. I would love ACPS to go through the exercise of composing an email to parents as though we're a trusted group of community members who can be counted upon to come through when needed.

21. Moving through this process and writing these policies in fear of those rich, white folks gives them the outsized influence and power that people fear they have. Our, your, avoidance preserves their fragility. Tell white people yes where you can, and no where it's harmful. Tell white people what you need. There are more of us out there who want to do the right thing—and, frankly, more of us who will never actually open your emails—than there are jerks.

Thank you and your colleagues SO MUCH for the relentless, tireless, and often thankless work you do on our behalf. Really, you are all gifts and we are lucky to have you. I hope this feedback is as helpful as it is long! (6/9/2020)

22. Dear Superintendent Hutchings and Honorable School Board Members,
In January, on behalf of Grassroots Alexandria, we asked you for a renewed commitment to Restorative Practices (RP). We requested a prioritization of RP in the Equity for All Strategic Plan 2020 - 2025, to reflect the ACPS mission of, "inspiring students and addressing barriers to learning."

We are dismayed that RP are not highlighted in the Strategic Plan. We know that reengagement and reattachment will be vital for Alexandria students and families, who have been distanced by Covid-19 and racial injustice in our society. Language is important. We need Restorative Practices to reconnect and rebuild relationships.

I served on the team that met earlier this school year with ACPS students and administrators, as well as community partners, to create questions for the Equity Audit. Together we wrote and edited questions for the survey, including specific questions surrounding RP. Why doesn't the Strategic Plan reflect this RP work?

Including RP as a priority in the Strategic Plan will align with the new guidelines from the VDOE on discipline for school districts, which emphasizes RP over more punitive systems.

Thank you for your consideration. (6/9/2020)

23. I took a look at the whole package of communications materials around the plan on ACPS's website and the document online is way more thorough than the PDF I reviewed earlier. A lot of my earlier concerns are actually addressed in this document, so I'm sorry that my earlier comments aren't really relevant anymore. I've updated them below:

I love that the School Board and your stakeholder committee have used equity as the lens that underpins the plan, rather than having it be a standalone goal, as it was in the 2020 plan. *I still feel this way*

As of 06/22/2020



I also love that the goal areas are more outcomes-oriented and less function-oriented, like they were in the 2020 plan. It's more inspiring and also respects the holistic nature of this work. I do wonder if elements might get really fuzzy further down in the weeds - for example, high-quality staff was a goal in the 2020 plan and presumably this and all of its underpinnings are still something ACPS wants, but would these elements fall under Instructional Excellence or would elements be scattered throughout the goals? It's a tedious question and I really do think the structure of this plan looks more promising than the previous, but just something to think about, in case you're worried about a messy/confusing implementation plan* I still worry about this, but it's more clear what goes where looking at the new document*

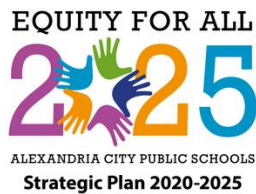
I also think about continuity of data collection from the last plan to the next - does the new structure lend itself to evaluation continuity? I know that the CYFCC thinks a lot about measures from across the various departments and I know that systems alignment is a goal city-wide. If you feel like this plan doesn't lend itself to alignment with DCHS, The Health Department, The Recreation Division, etc and other relevant partners in educational and whole-person outcomes for our kids, it might be worth advocating for changes that would lead to greater alignment. *This seems to be addressed and my comment is not relevant.*

I'm thinking about equitable learning outcomes from a community systems perspective and of course we know that food, shelter, safety, and ACEs reduction/trauma support are all central to ensuring that students can learn and grow in our schools. Some of these fall well outside of the "normal" responsibilities of a school system, but making a dent in them could make a big impact on achieving targeted outcomes. For example, housing is not really something ACPS wakes up and thinks about, but we know that ACPS can play a role in housing provision from a facilities planning perspective (see: George Mason (eye roll)). How can these wraparound supports fit into this plan? Are they considered?* I do see some of this built into student supports (particularly around mental and emotional health), but I think we're missing an opportunity to lift up the power of wraparound services to boost student outcomes and improve equity. I don't think you can improve equity without intentionally and equitably focusing on whole-student wellbeing vis-a-vis wraparound supports. Many schools seek to do this in their own ways, but not building it into the plan a) leads to inequitable implementation, b) means that schools may not prioritize it as much as they could (or want to) because it's not something they're being "graded" on. *

Where do partnerships, and particularly OSTP partnerships fall? For example, we know that OSTP programs, particularly in the summer, can be a big boost for kids' learning and a necessary support to help ACPS meet its objectives. OSTP programs city-wide are adopting enrichment objectives in order to meet this need. But equity in availability of OSTP programs is a big issue and a huge percentage of our kids are unaccounted for in afterschool hours. Does ACPS have a role in bridging this gap? Or should it? *This comment is no longer relevant - it's included in student supports*

New thoughts:

I think I am actually pro-this, but I notice that *none of the goals are about educational outcomes or getting the division to meet or exceed state levels*. I actually think that I like this and I think that strong



division-wide alignment, strong instruction, student support, and strategic/equitable resource allocation could add up to our schools meeting or exceeding statewide targets.

*I don't see anything about increasing the student:academic advisor ratio at TC. *I don't have data on this, but I've heard anecdotally that it's really hard for students to access their advisors and, particularly with the high school project underway, students need more access to advisors to help navigate the myriad options available to them.

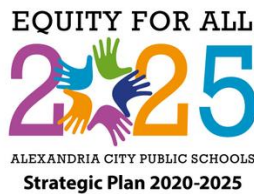
One of my biggest equity concerns for the new high school project is that it is so big and complex and the kids whose parents are able to be super involved will get the cool opportunities while students whose parents are less able to be involved fall through the cracks or get a very standard education that doesn't energize them for what lies beyond high school.

I'm not seeing much about *how *student safety will be accomplished. This may have changed, but last I knew, many of our schools have an armed police officer on site and referrals to law enforcement were quite high. *I think we should be getting police out of our schools. If not now, when?* This is the latest information I was able to find <https://b.3cdn.net/advancement/bb6fcc21e7319c4dd_5fm6iendc.pdf>, so perhaps steps have been taken, but this does seem to be a big problem and this report makes great suggestions.

OK, I'll stop here. (6/10/2020)

24. Good morning! I'm writing to share the following feedback on the 2025 Strategic Plan from the CTE Advisory Committee:
- Career and Technical Education is never directly mentioned in the 2025 Strategic Plan (CTE is only implied)
 - The Data Workbook did not include the CTE Annual Performance Report (APR) data (attached) that makes connections to English and math SOLs, graduation rates, CTE completers, and non-traditional enrollment
 - Page 6 (#4) of the 2025 Strategic Plan references that there are "Multiple pathways to a High School diploma and beyond," but does not reference CTE
 - Page 13 under Implement the High School Project says, "Implement IAB to provide opportunities to experience different careers." This is not the goal of the IABs -- it is to bring all types of resources to ACPS.
 - Page 15 AVID is referenced along with work-based learning, yet CTE in general, pathways, and the 17 national CTE career clusters that make up the IABs are never mentioned.
 - Page 17 What does "Adopt a weighted student formula that includes central office positions" mean for CTE? The CTE program currently has 65 teachers, 72 HS courses, 9 middle school courses, and about 6500 students that take CTE courses. (6/15/2020)
25. Allocating resources to the highest need schools and programs is flawed given ACPS' intentional diversification of schools. A solid percentage of students at a "lower need" school e.g. George Mason are free and reduced lunch as well as ELL. I would hope that ACPS plans to allocate instructional support

As of 06/22/2020



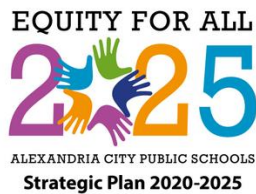
proportionally based on FARM numbers, ELL or whatever measure used. Not at all suggesting I'm against diversity in schools but to make my point - What is the point of bringing kids from Arlandria to George Mason if ACPS allocates more resources to Cora Kelly and therefore if a child attended there they might have better instructional support than they receive at Mason because more money has been allocated to Cora Kelly? Purchasing and supplying differentiated materials is all well and good but if there is no accountability placed on the use of such materials they may not be implemented or utilized as intended. E.g. TAG audit found curriculum materials ACPS had purchased but weren't being used in the classroom. I don't really understand the hang up on the disproportionality of TAG? Again it's mentioned in this report. First of all the way accountability always presents the statistics makes it seem like 60% of white students are in TAG when in fact it is that 60% of TAG identified students are white. I'm making up the percentage but the way it is shown in graphs confuses almost everyone. Dr. Mzingo once said "I don't know why we wouldn't want all students to be TAG identified?" I would hope that rather than focus on the "disproportionality" or the problems with TAG that instead we might seek to bolster learning opportunities for those that show strong aptitude or are high achieving regardless of the TAG label. So young scholars at every school, maybe a summer boost type course for upper elementary students who show aptitude for critical thinking and problem solving, etc. that brings together students from across the district. Equity as it is defined in this report claims to address the potential of every student - I feel strongly that more resources should be devoted to the TAG umbrella in an effort to capture the overlooked and enrich every possible kid. Hiring staff to help with identification particularly in native languages would be an excellent idea. A big problem with TAG identification is how needlessly complicated it is made to be and how difficult it is for even the most informed parents to process. It is no wonder you have lower participation numbers for ELL when frequently the ID process involves parent or community recommendation. To this end you could work with community partners to identify students who demonstrate strong aptitude. I also hate the term talented and gifted - why can't we be AAP like Fairfax and have tier systems for identification?

I would like to see accountability be identified as a critical part of this plan -ACPS does not seem to do a good job with accountability. If a teacher doesn't differentiate and the principal doesn't care then it doesn't really matter if the strategic plan or central office espouses rhetoric that all of ACPS differentiates instruction. I understand that you cannot standardize (6/14/2020)

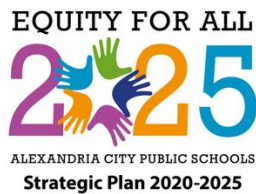
Feedback Received by Public Comment

26. Make Sure the Ceiling Doesn't Drop as the Floor Rises

Part of "every student succeeds" is accelerated learning for students who are capable of above grade-level work. I hate to use the term "talented and gifted" because this goes against the growth mindset - it's a label about innate characteristics vs. what a student is or can do. Some students can learn more and faster - they have an outsized capacity to absorb and assimilate knowledge, and in that sense they have special needs. Let's make sure that the needs of those students are addressed - and that all students capable of that academic performance are identified and supported. (5/26/2020)



27. In the strategic plan, I applaud the acknowledgement of our city's history of racism and how systemic racism still exists in our community. The equity focus of the plan is laudable and necessary. There are a few areas for clarification or addition I had. For the theory of action, I didn't see data-informed decision-making noted. There are many measures listed in the plan, but it wasn't as clear to me how data would be regularly used for continuous improvement by the central office, the school board, and at the building level. For "Measuring Our Impact" on page 8, are the measures listed those for the VA accountability system? These are important measures of student performance, but I wonder about other measures we care about in our community. Is there a measure of school culture and climate that we could use, or do already use, to measure the quality of our school learning environments? A school culture and climate measure (there are many evidence-based instruments - UChicago's 5 Essentials, Panorama, Washoe County's, etc), that, if done well, also include student, teacher and parent surveys, so we'd know if students feel supported, challenged, valued and safe at school. There are many data points from an Equity Audit and other surveys listed on other pages of the strategic plan, but they aren't rolled up to show measures we care about as a city. We value other things outside of academics at ACPS, but our measures of continuous improvement aren't reflecting that clearly on page 8. Finally, I didn't see called out enough our vision for a more relevant, personalized high school experience for kids. The High School Project is a historic opportunity for ACPS over the next five years, but it sounds like the same high school experience will exist for kids, if we're only looking at the strategic plan. I'd like to see more emphasis on a vision for high school redesign. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. (6/2/2020)
28. Please implement restorative practices (RP) throughout ACPS in order to reduce the number of suspensions. Black boys are being suspended at an alarming rate in ACPS, even in elementary schools. RP works collectively and only works with community "buy in." The "case management approach" described in your document sound like it singles out individual students or groups of students, separates them from the community, and labels them a problem that is of no concern to the rest of the student body. The latter might be easier (and less expensive in the short run), but the former (RP) is effective. I'd rather pay up front for good school than pay later to warehouse former ACPS in jail cells. Further, please remove police from schools and replace their functionality in some other way. In general, police frighten students of color while making white students more comfortable. This dynamic supports systemic racism (6/9/2020)
29. I am concerned the strategic plan does not appropriately address the needs of dyslexic student specifically and reading instruction. In my experience, ACPS is committed to trying to deny recognizing my child's dyslexia. Assuming this is an across the board problem, this failure denies dyslexic students of appropriate instruction. Moreover, the reference to evidence based balanced reading instruction is concerning because it seems to ignore the science of reading. That science indicated the evidence based Phonics instruction is most effective. Of course, exposure to stories and vocabulary remains important but students need tools to decode words. The referenced to "balanced reading" indicates a lack of commitment to provide students those tools. (6/9/2020)
30. Thank you for the opportunity to address the board. It feels very bizarre to call all those rolls to be the only speaker. My comments are below.
Strategic Plan



I am writing to you concerning the Strategic Plan Theory of Action item number 4, bullet number 1 - Balanced Literacy. Programs that fall under this label in many cases, in fact, will perpetuate the inequities that this plan is hoping to address. Balanced Literacy (and the current curricula highlighted on page 13) does not adequately address word-level reading skills in a systematic and explicit fashion. Such programs also lack both deep knowledge-building and a focus on vocabulary expansion. And if you take word of esteemed author and journalist Natalie Wexler, they perpetuate and exacerbate oppression (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nataliewexler/2020/06/06/how-readinginstruction-oppresses-black-and-brown-children/#bc4ced137053>). Balanced Literacy, with its focus on meaning creation before all else, misses a crucial piece - teaching students how to actually read (or decode) a word. It relies on a variety of “strategies” that claim to be evidence-based but are refuted by decades of science. Proficient readers do not memorize whole words, look at just the first and last letter, or look at a picture to read words. Proficient readers have cracked the alphabetic code of English and orthographically mapped thousands of words into their brain for instant and effortless recall- no picture or guessing required.

But English is a complex language requiring systematic and explicit instruction for most to reach this required level of automaticity. Teachers need the knowledge of how these complex systems work along with our phonemic processor to create proficient readers who can truly achieve. Rather than wasting teachers’ limited time on professional development adhering to a failed curriculum, provide them the knowledge to be truly life-changing to the students in their classroom. Let this strategy document reflect ACPS’s true commitment to equity and “high-impact” teaching by recording that Balanced Literacy, to us, means explicit and systematic instruction on word-reading skills combined with rigorous knowledge-building curriculum that excites, engages, and ignites a passion to read. (6/9/2020)

31. I provide these comments as an ACPS parent, a member of the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, and a member of the Poverty work group for the Health Department’s Community Health Improvement Plan. Overall comments:

I found it powerful that the document puts equity up front. Unfortunately, the power of equity does not appear in the goals, metrics, and strategies. Instead, the Goal pages devolve into the same education-ese that we have been using for as long as I’ve been involved in ACPS. There is no passion, no “through line” describing equity or significant change, no mantle that people can grab onto and say, “Yes, I want to be part of this.”

As I mentioned during my comments at tonight’s public hearing, the opportunity to really address equity is with us in this moment. You need to use it. The “likely areas of focus” listed on p. 6 are not pushing the envelope. It is similar to the issues we discussed back in 2010. Where is breaking the implicit K-12 tracking system that pushes Black and Brown students out of TAG, Honors, and AP classes? This starts in kindergarten and is well known inside ACPS. We cannot assure high numbers of non-white/non-affluent students enrolling in and succeeding at AP classes if we don’t change teacher culture starting in kindergarten and find and inform parents of kindergarteners. Our strategic plan needs to say this out loud. Also, as I mentioned about community and family engagement, we cannot continue to “be more welcoming” to families. We know why families of color, immigrants, and those struggling financially don’t come to school. We need to have a cohesive plan to go out and find families. This is hard, but if we really

As of 06/22/2020



want to address equity, we need to do it.

There are many more examples of opportunities to be bold inside this plan. You need to make your staff work harder and not be lazy—going to the things they know and are comfortable with.

I assume this document is supposed to be for the public. It should be easy to read, compelling, inclusive. It should encourage action on the part of the reader. It does not achieve this status. The Goal pages use too much edu-speak and the language is too passive. It does not say “We will...” “ACPS will work with the community to...” If you want all parts of the community to embrace this, declare who you are and what you are doing in simple language and with pride.

The whole thing needs a good edit. Word choice is everything, and the words are not active, uplifting, descriptive. From a grammar perspective, there are issues, and we know the Alexandria community is demanding and will pick apart missed details. For example: Decide whether or not to use Oxford Comma and then commit to it. Be careful about subject-verb agreement in longer/complex sentences, e.g., p. 11, 3rd bullet point from the bottom.

I was actually planning to print out the pages of this plan and write detailed comments and suggestions—it’s the editor in me. However, when I printed it out, it was unreadable. It was not designed to be printed on 8.5 x 11 paper. Again, not user friendly. This is another longstanding issue with ACPS.

Below are some specific thoughts/comments I began listing when I wanted to do a comprehensive edit. I stopped after several pages, but you will get the idea of my direction (if you don’t have it already ☹): When talking about Focus Areas, I wouldn’t use the term “limit.” E.g., on p. 10, bullet 3, “focus attention, energy, and resources on a limited number of strategic areas...” You need to speak positively on your decision to choose THESE goals and THESE focus areas because they will benefit all students, will give a laser focus to improving equity, and

P. 4. definition of Educational Excellence includes “Reflective citizenship” What does that mean? I urge you to use simple language.

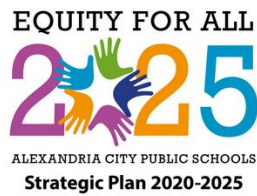
Advantage/Privilege: The first sentence doesn’t make sense.

P 5. “Equity-Focused” removing barriers seems like a low bar to me. I would like to see language more like what’s in the text on p. 4. **Change** would be an important word here. Changing how ACPS works, how teachers focus on teaching and learning (less emphasis on testing, more on meeting students where they are and uplifting them).

Innovate should be more than solving problems. I’d like to see more positive language here.

P 6. Other than #1, the bolded sentences are not actually “belief statements.” They are more like “rules of the road” that ACPS will follow. Beliefs are aspirational and tug at the heart and soul. There is great opportunity to engage here, but this section misses the mark.

P 10. Measures. “Knowledge of the Division’s identified strategic areas of focus...” I don’t think this matters. Whether anyone “knows” the areas of focus is too low a bar/borders on irrelevant if they don’t understand how the focus areas will make their work different (teachers and staff), impact their experiences (students and families) and create an improved narrative about the division (community). “Transform the Division into a Learning Organization.” Shouldn’t ACPS already BE a learning organization? What do you really mean here?



“Provide regular updates on impact and implementation of the strategic plan.” I would include more entities than the Board on updates. When I read this, I thought, “Why wouldn’t they want to update me?” “Create a culture in which Division operations department works collaboratively to support the education delivered to students.” You need to capitalize Operations Department for this sentence to make sense. (6/10/2020)

32. Hi Again,

Attached, please find the Racial Equity Rapid Response Framework being used by the Alexandria Health Dept in program development in response to COVID 19. There may be some useful tips and questions to look at planning and training with an equity lens. (6/10/2020)