

# Strategic Planning Meeting - Mission and Vision

April 3, 2025

## 1. Comments on the Statement: “Empowering Atlanta students to shape the future”

### General Reception

- Broadly supported as a **forward-looking, aspirational** vision.
- Recognized as a **clear and simple** message reflecting collective ambition.
- Liked for its emphasis on **student agency and ownership** of Atlanta’s future.

### Suggestions & Concerns

- **Clarify “future”** – what kind of future are we referring to (e.g., college, career, life)? Concerns about it being too vague.
- Emphasize **options for students who may not go to college**.
- Suggested revision: “Empowering Atlanta students to shape *their* future” to make it more personalized.
- Encouragement to consider the **historical significance** of Atlanta’s students shaping the world and incorporating that cultural legacy.
- Some proposed making the phrase even more global: “...to shape the future *of the world*.”

## 2. Comments on the Statement: “Educate with excellence, creating growth, building grit, and preparing graduates”

### Educate with Excellence

- Defined as learning what’s needed to do what must be done.
- Excellence should reflect **meeting high standards**, but not through **unrealistic expectations** (e.g., “110%” mentality).
- Questioned what **“excellence”** means and how it should be assessed fairly and equitably.

### Creating Growth

- Seen as **multidimensional**, not just academic.
- Growth should include **critical thinking, character development, and human development**.
- Acknowledged the importance of **tracking meaningful progress**, including out-of-school success.

### Building Grit

- Highly **debated** term:
  - Critics argued it can **mask systemic inequities**, such as poverty and racial injustice.
  - Grit often places **burden solely on students**, rather than acknowledging institutional responsibility.
- Suggested that “grit” be better defined or potentially replaced with terms like **perseverance**, **tenacity**, or **resilience** in context.
- Advocates stressed that **developing effort and stamina** is still critical in modern learning, especially with new technology and academic challenges.

## Preparing Graduates

- Graduation should represent **true readiness**, not just completion.
- Highlighted the disconnect between high graduation rates and **low literacy proficiency**.
- Emphasized alignment between **academic standards, life readiness, and post-secondary success** (college, certification, employment, military).

## 3. Top Priorities Identified by Participants

### A. Schools

#### Common Priorities:

- **Equity and inclusion:** Ensure fair access and support for all students.
- **High-quality teaching:** Certified teachers and ongoing professional development.
- **Pathways for all students:** Inclusive of diverse post-secondary routes (college, career, life).
- **Shift from test scores to learning:** Focus on the learning process, not just standardized testing.
- **Assessment and accountability:** Transparent systems tied to real outcomes.

#### Other Suggestions:

- Welcoming **facilities and infrastructure** that motivate students.
- Better integration of **culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy**.

### B. APS District (Systems-Level)

#### Common Priorities:

- **Mental health and wellness:** Possibly renamed as “life enrichment spaces.”
- **Facilities and infrastructure:** Maintenance and modernization for safe, inspiring environments.
- **Policy review:** Fair, clear, and consistently applied policies.
- **Data-informed decisions:** Use of robust data systems to guide improvement.

### **Additional Ideas:**

- **District-wide Ninth Grade Academy:** Suggested as a developmental transition support.
- Need for **relevant technology tools** and better data access for teachers and students.

## **C. Family and Community**

### **Common Priorities:**

- **Accessible communication and community presence:**
  - Bring APS into neighborhoods (e.g., pop-up info stands, meetups in local venues).
  - More engagement in familiar and accessible spaces like McDonald's, laundromats, or churches.
- **Tutoring and mentoring:** Expand support systems outside of school hours.
- **Support for marginalized families:** Resources and programming tailored to specific needs.
- **Career exposure and partnerships:**
  - Early and frequent exposure to jobs, apprenticeships, ROTC, aviation, etc.
  - Partnerships with local industries and services.
- **Cultural respect and shared expectations:** Promote understanding and mutual accountability between schools and families.
- **Athletic-based engagement:** Proposed requiring parent meeting attendance as a condition for student athletic participation to boost family involvement.