

Round 4 - Mission and Vision/Priorities Summary

1. "Empowering Atlanta students to shape the future" (Vision Statement)

Themes of Support:

- Generally well-received and described as “clear,” “aspirational,” and aligned with district goals.
- Participants appreciated the emphasis on **Atlanta** as a defining identity and the intention to center students as agents of change.
- Supporters highlighted that it “sets a tone” and recognizes students as capable of shaping their own futures.

Key Critiques and Suggestions:

- The **word "future"** was seen as too vague. Community members emphasized the need to clarify whether this refers to **career, college, civic life, or broader societal impact**.
- Suggested to personalize it more: “**shape *their* future**” to place ownership more clearly on students.
- Concern was raised about the **lack of explicit reference to equity, creativity, or human-centered growth**, with some calling it too “industrial” or “generic”.

2. "Educate with excellence, creating growth, building grit, and preparing graduates" (Mission Statement)

Supportive Themes:

- "Educate with excellence" was broadly supported, with participants stating it reflects ambition and commitment to quality.
- “Creating growth” was seen positively when it was connected to **academic, personal, and social-emotional development**.
- “Preparing graduates” was considered necessary and measurable, but stakeholders wanted it tied more directly to **readiness for life, not just diplomas**.

Key Concerns (especially about “grit”):

- The term “grit” sparked extensive debate across every meeting. Concerns included:

- It can **ignore systemic inequities** and suggest that students' lack of success is due to personal failings.
- It may unintentionally **promote a harmful hustle culture**, especially in marginalized communities.
- It may place **disproportionate burden on students** without holding systems accountable.
- Suggestions included replacing or redefining "grit" to emphasize **community resilience**, **collective support**, or to use alternate terms like "tenacity," "perseverance," or "resilience" — and define them clearly.

Top Priorities for Schools, District, and Family/Community

1. Top Priorities for Schools

Recurring priorities across all sessions:

- **High-Quality Teaching & Instructional Practices:** Seen as the most critical lever for change, often paired with ongoing professional development.
- **Assessment and Accountability:** Focused not just on testing, but **transparent and timely feedback loops** that support improvement.
- **Whole Child Learning / Equity & Inclusion:** Called foundational; includes mental wellness, SEL, belonging, and safety.
- **Pathways for All Students:** Emphasized **career exposure, dual enrollment, non-college tracks**.

2. Top Priorities for APS District/System

- **Facilities and Infrastructure:** Safe, well-maintained, and technologically equipped schools are essential.
- **Mental Health and Wellness:** Prioritized consistently, with calls for embedded supports and trauma-informed practices.
- **Data-Informed Systems:** Importance of using both **quantitative and qualitative data** for real-time decision-making and program evaluation.
- **Transportation Equity:** Suggested in relation to **after-school programming access** and **equity for marginalized students**.

3. Top Priorities for Families and Community

- **Accessible Communication:** Unanimous agreement on the need for **streamlined, multilingual, two-way platforms**.

- **Tutoring and Mentoring:** Strong desire for **academic and social-emotional support** outside of traditional class time.
- **Shared Responsibility:** Emphasizing the role of **parents, teachers, and community leaders** in student success.
- **Support for Marginalized Families:** Includes **housing insecurity, special education needs, cultural competence**, and systemic access issues.
- **Community-Based Career Exposure:** Real-world learning via partnerships with businesses and local industries, especially for middle and high school students.

Final Notes

- There is **clear alignment** across meetings on the importance of narrowing focus and creating clarity in strategic priorities.
- **Words matter:** stakeholders are invested in not just catchy phrases, but **deep definitions and alignment** to real outcomes.
- The “**Atlanta identity**” is both a point of pride and a responsibility: participants expect APS to serve as a leader and model within the city.

¹ These points reflect themes that emerged consistently across multiple meetings. Notably, participants highlighted special education as a critical area of concern; emphasized the need for policy review to streamline initiatives and reduce conflicting priorities; and highlighted student engagement, retention, and foundational supports such as nutrition and housing as essential to academic success.