

DOTHAN CITY SCHOOLS (DCS) STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2020



I. Introduction

In late 2013, the Dothan City Schools launched a highly inclusive and comprehensive strategic planning process guided by [Millennia Consulting](#) and generously supported by the [Wiregrass Foundation](#).

Over an eight-month period, from November 2013 to June 2014, a diverse array of over three hundred Dothan citizens participated in comprehensive planning process to advance public education in Dothan, energized by the compelling vision that “all Dothan City Schools students will graduate prepared for immediate entry into college or career.”

To begin the planning process, in November 2013 a Steering Committee of twenty citizen-leaders, described below was convened. Guided by the consultants, they authorized a series of interviews, focus groups, and an online survey to gather the perceptions of parents, teachers, students, administrators, school board members, business leaders, city officials, and other community leaders regarding local education. The themes that emerged from these discussions were compiled in the “Current Reality Analysis,” a portrait of the school system and the environment in which it operates including factual information such as demographic and achievement data and

information of the local economy, as well as the qualitative perceptions and ideas offered by community stakeholders.

In March, the Steering Committee met in a two-day retreat to craft a vision and a set of priorities based on the data and perspectives identified in the Current Reality Analysis. Every effort was made to honor the opinions and insights offered by the many stakeholders of DCS. At the same time, choices and decisions have been made in order to create a compelling vision accompanied by a plan that is focused on key strategic priorities that will actualize the vision and ensure disciplined action going forward. In the months that ensued, Steering Committee members met and refined their strategic thinking.

The resulting draft plan was presented and refined in four lively and well-attended community meetings in May 2014 and organized by the Dothan Education Foundation in collaboration with DCS. The Dothan Board of Education approved the final 2015-2020 Dothan City Schools Strategic Plan in July 2014. The plan, entitled ***Every Child-Every Future***, includes the vision and six key strategies with specific goals and measures for advancing public education in Dothan over the next five years.

II. What Students, Parents And The Community Can Expect To See!

In plain language, students, parents and the community can expect to see tangible results. On the academic front, there will be a new assessment that parents can better understand and each year's scores from grades three through ten will provide a trajectory toward the ACT score and college entry. Each student will graduate with success indicators, such as dual enrollment, Advanced Placement, or Career Tech credentials, that will prepare them for college or work. DCS will continue to strive for instruction and programs that challenge all students.

We will be actively engaged in building community pride, spirit and support for the Dothan City Schools because investment in our public schools equals investment in the social and economic vitality of our community as a whole. We hope to build even more partnerships with businesses and universities to enhance career development and college access for our students.

Thanks to continued support from the Wiregrass Foundation, elementary schools will engage in building *Community Schools*, a national model in which parents become partners in deciding what extended activities and service are available for families. It is well-known that pre-school programs put children on a successful academic path from the get-go. We want to increase the availability of preschool programs. Once in school, our new 1-to-1 Initiative will put an iPad in the hands of every student and teacher putting DCS at the cutting edge of e-learning. We will expand our career and college readiness programs and support our students and families with enhanced social, emotional, behavioral, and physical supports.

Teachers, support staff, and administrators are the backbone of the school system. We want to attract and retain highly qualified and inspired personnel at all levels able to meet 21st Century learning needs. As a result we will be working to develop a mentoring program

for teachers and leaders and hope to continue to provide professional development opportunities that enable our staff to grow and change with the time.

Finally, this plan calls for the increased and diversified funding necessary to maintain first class academics and infrastructure. We want to keep student learning *first* in all decision making— putting the best resources in the right places. In building strong community support for public education, we hope to create a forum for open discussions about zoning, building additions to schools, upgrades to facilities and when necessary, new facilities.

III. Summary of the Current Reality Analysis

The Current Reality Analysis is based on fact and themes that emerged from interviews and focus groups with a wide variety of citizens--referred to as 'stakeholders'--who are involved with the public schools, along with documentary information about Dothan City Schools and the external environment in which the school system operates. It is a snapshot in time that answers the question, "Where are we now?" and invites the reader to ask, "What are the implications for the future?" Information gathered is used to inform future planning. A summary of the current reality includes these prominent themes:

- **Facts about Dothan.** Dothan is a city of 67,382 (2012) with a public school system of approximately 9336 students. The student body is 60% African American, 35% White, 3% Hispanic, and 2% other. There are two high schools and eleven elementary and four middle schools. Two middle schools are magnets. The system has a few Pre-K classrooms but does not offer universal Pre-K. Other special schools include the PASS Academy and the Accelerated Recovery Center.
- **Perceptions and reality.** Overall DCS is has a strong teaching and learning environment that has improved over the past three years. The Superintendent and other administrators are well-respected,

collaborative and hold high standards. Teamwork is strong. There is a strong student-centered culture supported by social-emotional services. The faculty are well-educated and many have master's degrees. The elected school board takes its responsibilities seriously and works well with the school administration. Yet, there is a perception that the public at large does not understand or value what DCS has accomplished, nor do most people have a reality-based sense of what goes on day-to-day in the public schools. DCS' budget is too low to sustain or build higher quality education. Per pupil expenditure is low compared to other Alabama school systems.

- **Academic opportunity.** In the past three years, DCS has successfully increased the graduation rate to 88%, test scores are up and the system ranks first or second on several Alabama state academic indices. Racial gaps in achievement are narrowing. There has been a significant expansion of career tech offerings. Two high schools duplicate some resources but also divide resources and loyalties, so that there are facility deficits at both schools, e.g. auditorium at one school but not the other. This dichotomy may also create unnecessary rivalries. Magnet schools please parents whose children are enrolled in them, but have created tension and possible unfairness in the system as a whole. Students would like more special programs, such as International Baccalaureate, foreign languages, fine arts and would like to collaborate more across schools. Students in the general education program need more stimulating offerings, more encouragement, and higher expectations. Learning technologies are not always well integrated into the curriculum and not all teachers use technology well. Pre-school is not fully available, despite solid research about its educational merits.
- **Supportive services.** The system strives for a positive, student-centered culture with a "family atmosphere." The school system values supportive services, such as enhanced mental health services, special education, tutoring, and coaching programs, but

there are few resources for program expansion. College counseling is understaffed and could do a better job of introducing and preparing students for opportunities outside the region. Additional counselors would be needed in order to deliver high-quality academic, college, and career counseling. Families need school-based health services, parenting skills, financial literacy, and remedial academic skills. The school system alone cannot fix poverty, although many expect it to.

- **School staffing.** The central office staff is very lean, and administrators are increasingly challenged to provide custodial, nutrition, transportation support to schools. Low pay scales have made the attraction and hiring of young teachers difficult, particularly in science and math. There are too many new initiatives and programs that are often very burdensome to teachers and administrators. The teacher training and recruitment pipeline is weak and may not be offering the right preparation for the current educational environment.
- **System administration.** Administrators are hard-working, data-driven, and willing to take risks on behalf of quality education, but the central office is understaffed to meet government mandates and administer a system of 9,336 students and 17 schools. For example, there are no directors of maintenance, purchasing, or development. The central office lacks diversity, in a system in which 60% of the student body is African American.
- **Infrastructure.** Buildings, transportation, and food service are maintained at basic levels but may not meet the needs of the future. School buildings are aging or old. Some schools are underpopulated. Transport is under-staffed, and vehicles are old and costly to maintain. The number of computer support staff is inadequate. Technology may change and grow faster than system can adapt and pay for it. Changes in federal nutrition guidelines are putting cost pressure on the nutrition department.

- **Funding.** The system's budget is likely too low to sustain the highest quality education and there have been budget cuts over the past several years. Property taxes in Dothan are lower than taxes in twelve other comparable Alabama cities. Referenda to increase the property tax have failed in the past. Teachers who were once paid more than suggested by the state salary matrix are now paid only what is minimally required. The per pupil expenditure rate is \$7,369, one of the lowest in the state. The average in the state is \$7,684, but one district spends over \$12,000 per student. DCS has a high percentage (66%) of students of free and reduced lunch.

Unfunded policy and program mandates are challenging as the district has only \$731 per student in discretionary funds.

The following strategic plan was developed with these findings in mind. While strategies and goals may not address each and every issue or concern, the intent is to move the district forward by focusing on long-term strategies that would advance academics and community building.



IV. Our Vision: Every Child, Every Future

All Dothan City School students will graduate prepared for immediate entry into college or career. This will be accomplished with educational programs and strategies that are innovative, flexible, student-centered, and which leverage the wisdom and energy of parents and communities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	GOALS	MEASURES OF SUCCESS ¹
<p>A. Meet or exceed the Alabama 2020 Learning Goals.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All students perform at or above proficiency and show continuous improvement (achievement/growth). 2. All students succeed (gap closure). 3. Every student graduates from high school (graduation rate). 4. Every student graduates from high school prepared (college and career-readiness). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The District’s Performance Index Score (a state-level metric that combines indicators for goals 1-4) will increase over the 5 years of the plan. b. Increase number of students who are college and career ready as measured by: acquisition of a business and industry recognized credential; advanced placement qualifying score; dual enrollment course completion; Work Keys qualifying score; ACT qualifying score.

¹ Upon board approval, benchmark data will be defined for each measure and specific annual targets developed and reported at regular intervals on a user-friendly dashboard.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	GOALS	MEASURES OF SUCCESS
<p>B. Build community pride, spirit and support for the Dothan City Schools, because investment in our public schools equals investment in the City of Dothan.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and execute a comprehensive strategic branding and marketing plan for the Dothan City Schools that increases visibility, touts its many significant educational outcomes, and builds support for increased local funding. 2. Further develop a community schools model that engages parents, students, school personnel at the local school level in creating innovative, flexible community-based education that exceeds expectations and prepares all students for their next step, college or career ready. 3. Challenge the business community to deepen its involvement in the public schools, providing additional resources to schools and learning opportunities to students. 4. Foster increased collaboration and cross-district learning, extracurricular and social opportunities at the primary and secondary levels. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Marketing Plan implemented. b. Successful implementation of Community Schools Pilot of 3 schools. Key benchmarks will be reached showing progress and achievement of outcomes. c. The number of business, faith and community partnerships will increase.
<p>C. Create a seamless educational pathway in which every child enters kindergarten ready to learn and graduates college and career ready.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Incrementally increase the availability of Pre-K with universal Pre-K as the eventual goal. 2. Provide students and teachers with 21st Century technology that prepares our students for immediate and successful entry into college or career. 3. Adopt, align, and implement college and career-ready standards in math and English language arts. 4. Increase business/industry partnerships such that students have more access to internships and apprenticeships while still in high school. 5. Continue to strengthen and deepen Dothan Technology Center offerings and career and college counseling. 6. Provide a differentiated educational experience that challenges, engages, and ensures mastery for each student. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Pre-K performance guidelines will be met or exceeded while increasing Pre-K access. b. Every student will have access to a digital device. c. The number of mentors, internships, and apprenticeships for students in area public and private businesses and institutions will increase.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	GOALS	MEASURES OF SUCCESS
<p>D. Foster the health and development of all students through social, emotional, behavioral, and physical supports in collaboration with parents and community partners.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure a safe and positive school environment for students that encourages student engagement, and includes anti-bullying initiatives, clear and consistent policies, and alternatives to traditional disciplinary sanctions. 2. Implement an early warning system for student absences and build a community-based support and intervention system. 3. Review and consider restructuring counseling supports to better accomplish academic, career and college counseling, and social-emotional goals. 4. Provide robust school-based health and mental health services through partnerships with external health and human service providers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Attendance and discipline data will show improvement. b. Student, parent, teacher survey and/or social-emotional survey will show improved satisfaction with policies and services.
<p>E. Attract and retain highly qualified and inspired personnel at all levels, able to meet 21st Century learning needs.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure that all system professionals are well-prepared, properly resourced and supported (e.g. professional development, facilities, materials and tools that are effective). 2. Create a system-wide culture that values flexibility, innovation and inspiration in the classroom. 3. Develop a teacher leadership and mentoring program for all teachers that fosters continuous learning and professional development. 4. Review, evaluate and recommend compensation packages for positions in Dothan City Schools that will attract the best and brightest talent for academic instruction and programs. 5. Strengthen the teacher/staff pipeline through the development of broader and deeper relationships with education programs regionally and nationally. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increased hiring and retention of Highly Qualified Teachers. b. Teacher mentor program will be designed, implemented and evaluated. c. Findings from a comprehensive teacher, principal, administrator survey will be analyzed and used to inform decision-making on goals.
<p>F. Adequately fund infrastructure critical to student outcomes including, but not limited to administrative personnel, facilities, transportation, nutrition and technology.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a comprehensive plan that examines the current and future population, zones, facility maintenance, and educational needs in each school and community. 2. Analyze initiatives, programs and staffing essential to meeting local, state, and federal mandates and adequately supporting school-based initiatives and innovations. 3. Analyze the current funding formula for public education and make recommendations about future formula adjustments. 4. Diversify and grow supplemental funding sources through additional grant writing and cultivation of private/corporate donors. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Local per student discretionary dollars will increase.

Board of Education 2013-2014

Dr. Harry Wayne Parrish, Chairman

Mrs. Brenda Guildford, District 1

Mr. Franklin Jones, District 2

Mrs. Melanie Hill, District 3

Mr. Jimmy Addison, District 4

Mr. Ben Armstrong, District 5

Mr. Chris Maddox, District 6

The Strategic Plan Steering Committee

A 20-member Strategic Plan Steering Committee, representing a cross-section of the community, designed and guided the strategic planning process. Committee members included parents and students, teachers and principals, leaders in business, post-secondary education and philanthropy, school system administrative and support personnel, along with members of the board of education and city commissioners.

Steering Committee Members

Dothan City Schools Classroom Teachers

Jamie Poland, Special Education Teacher
Traci Pruitt, Elementary School Teacher,
Steering Committee Chair

Business

Mark Freeman, Nuclear Technical Specialist,
Farley Nuclear Plant
Matt Parker, President, Dothan Chamber of
Commerce

Parents

Blake Daughtery, Elementary School Parent
Kelli Pylant, Elementary School and Middle
School Parent

Students

Jack Stansell, Dothan High School
Calvin Wilborn, Northview High School

Postsecondary Education

Ashli Wilkins, Dean of Instructional Services,
Wallace Community College

Dothan City Government

Albert Kirkland, City Commissioner

Dothan Education Foundation

Tami Culver, President, and parent of a Dothan
City Schools student

Dothan City Board of Education

Ben Armstrong, District 5
Melanie Hill, District 3
Chris Maddox, District 6

Dothan City Schools Principals

Tamika Fleming, Principal, Grandview
Elementary School

Chris Shaw, Principal, Northview High School

Dothan City Schools Administration and Support

Nita Lee, Secretary, Hidden Lake Elementary
School
Celeste Moorehead, Counselor, Dothan High
School
Allyson Morgan, Director-Central Office,
and Administrative Liaison to the Steering
Committee
Tim Wilder, Superintendent



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