



WISSAHICKON 2029

Family, Community, Environment

STRATEGIC PLAN

SEPTEMBER 2024



PREPARED BY:



222 N. KESWICK AVENUE
GLENESIDE, PA 19038
215.481.9777

PURPOSE & BACKGROUND

Our Identity

Wissahickon Charter School (“WCS”) is one of the premier K-8 public schools in Philadelphia. Founded in 2001, WCS now operates across two campuses in Northwest Philadelphia and serves 480+ students that reflect the broad and rich diversity of the city itself.

Now approaching its 25th Anniversary (2026), WCS has proudly upheld the vision of its founders, to ensure that every child has access to a high-quality education, and to draw upon the surrounding environment and its natural resources to provide access to outdoor learning opportunities for an often-underserved student population.

The school is now at a pivotal juncture and has seized upon the opportunity to reflect on its past success, consider its short-term opportunities and decision points, and map out a roadmap to long-term success that builds upon its greatest strengths and the core of its mission: “Family, Community, Environment”.

Since its inception, WCS has committed its resources to building and maintaining a project-based, student-centered environmental learning program, featuring a school garden, a service-learning program, a healthy lunch service with local produce, solar panels and a native stormwater retention basin. Its conversion of a former brownfield site in East Mt. Airy to its world-class school facility (the “Awbury Campus”) garnered local and statewide recognition for its efforts around environmental remediation, hazardous materials cleanup and beautification.

Over the years, WCS has also remained laser-focused on developing strong readers, mathematicians and scientists. It is well-regarded as a “feeder school” for some of the city’s strongest public and independent high schools, has successfully navigated multiple charter renewal cycles with the School District of Philadelphia, and sits at an all-time high in terms of enrollment demand among city residents.



Students at WCS are deeply cared for by the adults surrounding them, and the school's location provides a rich network of opportunities and resources they can draw upon for support and enrichment.

WCS's overarching Vision for its work with its K-8 students – 59% of whom are classified as Economically Disadvantaged and 20% of whom are classified with one or more learning exceptionalities – can be captured in the following programmatic distinctives:

- **Comprehensive Academic Curriculum:**
 - Core Subjects + Arts + Technology + Guidance
- **Social Emotional Learning:**
 - Responsive Classroom + Developmental Designs + C.A.R.E.S. + Talk It Out
- **Environmental Focus:**
 - Discovery (Sustainability Curriculum), Daily Outdoor Recess, Outdoor Learning Programs, Recycling & Compost
- **Parent Partnership:**
 - Wissahickon Parent Partnership (WPP) Organizations + Parent Teacher Compact + Volunteer Opportunities + Weekly Wissahickon Newsletter

WCS's Founders expressed its original Mission as follows:

Wissahickon will provide a community of learning with an environmental focus that stimulates the child's intellectual, social, and character development. In the years that followed, the school community further defined its Mission according to three (3) essential elements that have guided the creation of this Strategic Plan:

1. An integrated **environmental focus**, recognizing the importance of service learning
2. **Peace, conflict resolution, and community building** as part of a prioritized social curriculum
3. An emphasis on **family involvement** at all levels of the school organization, with special emphasis on parents as partners in the learning experiences of their children

Our Process

WCS's Leadership and Board of Trustees look to build upon the school's successful track record, recommit ourselves to Continuous Improvement, Reflection and Goal Setting, and chart a strategic and visionary course for the next phase of its future.

In partnership with its Business Manager and Strategic Advisor, Charter Choices, WCS initiated a 6-month process that included the following phases:



Now in its "public phase", the "Wissahickon 2029: Family, Community, Environment" Plan will be communicated to its key stakeholder groups and regularly measured for impact according to the following timeline:



CURRENT REALITY

Based on the Survey and Focus Group data collected in Spring 2024, as well as the SWOT Analysis and Visioning Work undertaken by the WCS Strategic Planning Committee, we have identified the following “Baseline” assumptions from which to build our strategic vision.



What are Our Greatest Strengths?

- Culture and Climate – Physical and Psychological Safety, Conflict Resolution, Empowering Kids, Building Community and Infusing Joy
- Staff is Invested and Committed
- Parents are Partners in their Children’s Learning
- Environmental Focus – Outdoor Classroom, Field Trips
- Service Learning and “Mission Fridays”
- Expeditionary Learning (“EL”) Projects – Interdisciplinary, Project-Based Learning



What are Our Growth Areas?

- Maximize Our Physical Space (Daily, and re: Environmental Focus)
- Encourage Parent Investment in Academics & Streamline Family Communication
- Define Our Cultural Approach & Refine Our Preventative Work w/SEL
- Focus on First 6 Weeks – Build Strong Classroom Communities
- Integrate Service Learning (leverage EL Programs)
- Improve Math Performance – get Kids Invested
- Formalize Leadership Commitment to DEI (Dedicated Role) – Check Our Biases

STRATEGIC VISION

Our Desired Future

Our Strategic Planning Committee, working on behalf of the entire school community, envisions a Future State in which Wissahickon Charter School remains the premier K-8 destination in the City of Philadelphia for an award-winning, holistic education grounded in environmental stewardship, even as we “double down” on our founding vision of integrating our focus on the natural world into a project-based curriculum with unique opportunities for service learning and hands-on, real-world application.

We imagine an even stronger school culture in which WCS Staff and Families renew their mutual commitments to partnering in service of children, in which communication and collaboration become more streamlined and accessible, and in which the “WCS Family” is enriched by joyful celebrations and community events that bring together parent volunteers and educators to create meaningful memories and establish new rituals.

Even as we proudly celebrate WCS’s legacy of success, we aspire to build an even more inclusive community that invests institutional resources in DEIB and SEL efforts on behalf of all stakeholders, that partners with community organizations whose values align with our own, and that invites our WCS Alumni to return to the community in ways that inspire and uplift our current students.

Furthermore, we look toward a future in which WCS achieves a greater measure of financial independence and sustainability through our fundraising and development activities, such that we position ourselves as a well-resourced, competitive employer that retains our greatest institutional asset, our professional staff.

Finally, we wish to keep students at the very center of these organizational improvements – even as we invest our time and energies on a variety of operational, cultural and financial priorities, our core focus will remain the quality of our academic programs, and the outcomes achieved by our students. We will continue to insist on providing

world-class, research-based curricular resources and instructional strategies in the core subject areas of Mathematics, Literacy, Science and Social Studies, all within a learning framework built upon Mastery, Inclusion and Equity.

Our Strategic Priorities

Based on the Strategic Planning Committee’s work around developing a Strategic Vision, we identified 5 Broad Categories into which our Strategic Goals and Actions can be organized:

Mission-Focused Priorities

- I. Environmental Focus
- II. Families as Partners
- III. Community Building

Instructional & Operational Priorities

- IV. Financial Health
- V. Academic Excellence



Our Goals & Actions

I. Environmental Focus

Action Steps

Goal #1

All WCS students will participate in a culminating, cross-curricular service-learning project that exemplifies environmental stewardship at least once per school year.

Develop and implement exemplar performance tasks modeled on Expeditionary Learning and – wherever possible – integrate into service-learning projects.

Support the creation of these performance tasks through Professional Development and coaching.

Send a team of educators to an Expeditionary Learning school to see projects in action, identify best practices and integrate into Professional Development.

Build a shared repository of grade-level projects for revision and implementation by future WCS educators.

Goal #2

All stakeholders (staff, students, and families) at WCS will be able to say how their actions impact the earth and will demonstrate the value of stewardship consistently (in all spaces, at all times).

Environmental Committee takes the lead in modeling Morning Meeting activities for staff, building a shared repository of environmental activities and developing a series of “green practices” lessons for the first six weeks of school.

Engage families in environmental education by creating an “Excellent Environmental Stewardship at WCS” resource based on the “Excellent Teaching at WCS” resource, by increasing the number/frequency of “Green Celebrations”, and by incorporating “environmental components” into all community-wide events.

Relaunch an organization-wide focus on Refuse/Reduce/Reuse/Repurpose/Recycle. Build clear knowledge of the rules of recycling for all stakeholders, including vendors.

Review Open Sci Ed Units to incorporate “green school practices” in the initial units across Grades K-5.

Goal #3

Maintain, re-institute, and expand green practices for our facilities and all departments.

Engage a third-party organization to conduct an environmental audit of WCS.

Utilized the audit outcomes to inform future capital improvements, such as a green roof, solar panels, or updated purchasing practices.

II. Families as Partners

Action Steps

Goal #1

WCS Staff and Families will work together to develop an updated "Family Agreement" to clarify expectations of all Parents and Guardians in supporting the success of their child(ren).

Build a single Family Agreement document that incorporates both the Title I Parent Compact and the existing AWMS Agreement. Update the agreement to include key information such as 8th grade event dates and costs.

Review the Family Agreement and general expectations for families during Back to School Night.

Take a data-driven approach (attendance, surveys, etc.) to boosting attendance at Back to School Night and other major events.

Goal #2

All WCS Families will make use of a single Communication System to access key information and communicate with school staff.

Conduct an audit of existing communication/technology platforms and select a single, web and app-based platform (for use across both campuses) to house grade data, homework information, and key updates while facilitating two-way communication between Staff and Families.

Provide families with formal opportunities (during Orientation and BTSN events, for example) for training on communication systems (downloading apps, creating accounts, logging in, locating key data and contacts, etc.).

Establish normed expectations for communication to families (such as Weekly Wiss, Weekly Classroom Newsletter, Monthly Calendar, etc.)

Build teacher capacity around Family Engagement topics (building relationships, having difficult conversations, encouraging involvement, etc.) through Professional Development.

Goal #3

WCS Staff and Families will work together to generate Joy, Pride and Enthusiasm for Partnership Events and Activities.

Foster community and family engagement through a series of related initiatives:

Fun and engaging social events on a regular (trimester) basis.

Annual homeroom events to which students bring families.

Launch incentives and celebrations to highlight strong partnerships (Parent/Family of the Month, Individual Classroom/ Homeroom Rewards, Social Media Shout-Outs, Parent Greeter and/or Donor Liaison Invitations, etc.).

Develop WCS-branded, family-centric "Swag" to promote a shared sense of pride and community.

Launch a "Positive Messages" initiative to encourage (and track) positive communications home from WCS staff.

Formalize opportunities for parent volunteerism through a series of related initiatives:

Implement Homeroom Parents/Family Reps with clearly defined roles to support teachers and encourage other families to get involved.

Create Mini-Training to "onboard" family volunteers, review expectations, school procedures, etc.

Invite families to identify (via Google Form) ways they can support WCS (through fundraising, staff appreciation events, field trips, etc.).

III. Community Building

Action Steps

Goal #1

WCS will amplify its commitment to DEI through strategic investments in personnel, staff development, and resources.

Leverage Committee Structure at both campuses to promote Peace and Inclusion and support community-wide events such as BLM Arts Night, HBCU Festival, MLK Day volunteering, etc.

Engage a Third-Party Organization to develop a Scope & Sequence for Race and Equity and DEIB Trainings for WCS Staff over a 3-Year period

Develop and eventually hire a dedicated Administrative Position that focuses on driving the organization's DEIB efforts through PD, Hiring Practices, Updating Institutional Practices, etc.

Goal #2

All WCS educators will – with adequate funding and support – adopt a unified, multicampus framework for SEL, classroom management, and culture building.

Focus WCS's approach to SEL by revisiting its commitments to Responsive Classroom (RC) and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) with a goal of selecting one or both (or finding an alternative) to utilize across campuses.

Using the selected SEL framework as a guide, develop and commit to a universal (while developmentally appropriate) system of consequences for student behavior.

Invest in both staff and parent training on the selected framework(s), incentives and consequences.

Track, assess and review data to measure impact of the selected framework(s) at both campuses over a 5-year period.

Goal #3

WCS will identify needs that an external partner could help us address and cultivate new (and maintain existing) community partnerships that align with and advance the three pillars of its Mission-Environment-Community-Families, with a target of 10 formal partnerships by Spring 2029.

Task a Board Committee (with Staff and Family Representatives) with conducting an audit of existing external partners, mapping that list to the school's Mission and Growth Areas, and identifying new partners across multiple sectors to help address any "gaps".

Develop an Engagement Strategy for new partnerships (meetings, touchpoints, contractual agreements, attending/sponsoring events, etc.), using Vetri Community Partnership as a model.

Set goals for partner engagement efforts, track and review data on a regular basis.

Goal #4

Engage alumni in connecting with one another and with the WCS school community.

Develop a WCS Alumni Engagement Group modeled on best practices at other K-8 schools.

Host Alumni Event (virtual and/or in person) to solicit input on their needs, ways WCS can support them and best mode(s) of communication.

Maintain database of Alumni Information (contact info, HS/College data, etc.).

Incorporate WCS Alumni into existing school events to speak to current students about HS, College, life and career goals.

IV. Financial Health

Action Steps

Goal #1

WCS will, through the coordinated efforts of its Foundation, Leadership and Board, raise \$1M annually to support school operations and programming by Spring 2029.

Launch Board Development Efforts through a series of related activities:

- Brainstorming Event focused on member recruitment, bylaws and setting fundraising goals.

- Identify and recruit Board prospects, partner organizations and donors (Foundations, "Corporate Wish List" of companies with patterns of giving, EITC partners) via a clear communication strategy.

- Establish Development Committee with representation from both Boards, convene monthly and provide regular updates.

- Establish engagement opportunities for WCS Staff (grant-writing, in-kind auction needs, field trips, etc.) and WCS Board (Spring Benefit, Career Day, HBCU Celebration, Basketball Game, etc.).

- Develop Annual Development Calendar and contract with a Marketing and/or Fundraising Professional to execute Social Media Strategy, update Website, Quarterly Fox & Tree, Photos & Video Collateral.

Goal #2

WCS will be a competitive employer with regards to pay and benefits offerings to staff.

- Task Board Finance Committee and Development Office with collaborative compensation analysis in Philadelphia and pursuing sources of external funding to align salaries with the marketplace.

- Conduct analysis of Staffing Model (relative to other schools with higher compensation) to identify potential efficiencies, restructuring and cost savings.



V. Academic Excellence

Action Steps

Goal #1

Leaders and teachers will have access to, analyze and use assessment data to provide appropriate scaffolds and supports to allow all WCS students the opportunity to achieve independent mastery for a learning target/objective.

Provide training, coaching and support to educators in implementing student-centered learning and formative assessment frameworks (EL, UDL, etc.).

Explore Performance Matters as a potential strategy for tracking and analyzing student assessment data.

Appropriately differentiate and scaffold learning and assessment frameworks (EL, UDL) so that all WCS students can be successful.

Goal #2

The MTSS team will identify and successfully implement a toolkit of literacy and math interventions. The MTSS team will ensure that 100% of students have equitable access to tiered supports.

Provide training, coaching and support to educators in implementing student-centered learning and formative assessment frameworks (EL, UDL, etc.).

Explore Performance Matters as a potential strategy for tracking and analyzing student assessment data.

Appropriately differentiate and scaffold learning and assessment frameworks (EL, UDL) so that all WCS students can be successful.

Goal #3

WCS will build a math program that prioritizes identity, joy, and mastery for all students as evidenced by 25% proficiency on the mathematics PSSAs (3-8) and 50% proficiency on the 1st/2nd grade universal screener.

Provide PD on Math Identity/Joy, Bridges/OUR, grade-level core mathematical concepts, scaffolding and formative assessments to all WCS staff.

Support staff through ongoing walkthroughs and coaching opportunities.

Develop and implement a Math PSSA Prep curriculum.

Engage families in supporting student math growth.

Goal #4

WCS will refine a literacy program that is fully aligned to the Science of Reading and gives all students access to proficient reading, writing, language and speaking/listening skills. The success of this program will be evidenced by 50% proficiency on the ELA PSSAs (Grades 3-8) and 60% at or above benchmark on the K-3rd grade DIBELS assessment.

Enhance Independent Reading programs at WCS (both in school and at home) by developing clear structures and supports for teachers and students.

Provide PD to WCS staff on language comprehension strands, the writing rope, EL, ALL Block, Language Dives and other research-based literacy strategies.

Develop and implement an ELA PSSA Prep curriculum.

Utilize language comprehension benchmarks, screeners, EL assessment and/or MAP data to drive Grades K-2 instruction in comprehension standards.

Goal #5

WCS will identify and successfully implement a standards-aligned science and social science program, including identifying pilot grades and curricula, and developing ways to supplement knowledge-building in grades without an explicit curriculum.

Evaluate the need for a Social Science Curriculum (Grades 6-8 or 3-8) and consider factors such as scheduling of other core subjects (Math, ELA, etc.).

Identify curricular priorities for Science (Grades 3-5), implement Open Sci Ed with fidelity through PD, walkthrough feedback and coaching.

IMPLEMENTATION

To prevent the foregoing goals and tasks from becoming merely aspirational – and to ensure the overall success of Wissahickon CS’s Strategic Plan over the next five (5) years, the Committee and its partners at Charter Choices have prepared the following set of supporting instruments, to be used by the school’s leadership, staff and board to track growth:

- [Strategic Implementation Tracker \(Linked\)](#)
 - Are we making timely progress on our goals?
 - Which individuals and teams are “owning” each of these tasks?
- [5-Year Budget Model \(Linked\)](#)
 - Where do we need to (re)calibrate our initial thinking?
 - How are we ultimately measuring our success?
 - Have we identified and aligned our resources to support this vision?
 - Do our financial priorities map to our organizational priorities?
 - Is our vision a sustainable one for the organization over time?

CALL TO ACTION



Kristi Littell
 CEO

Dear Wissahickon Charter School friends and family,

Twenty- two years ago, Wissahickon Charter School opened its doors to students at our Fernhill campus in Germantown. Our founders were committed to developing a mission-driven organization and designed a powerful school vision of: Families as Partners; Peace, Conflict Resolution, and Community; and Environmental Learning and Service. For two decades, through every challenge and opportunity, we have turned to our mission to guide our work.

Last winter, we launched a strategic planning process that invited families, students, staff, and our Board of Trustees, to identify priorities for Wissahickon’s next phase. In the same way we ask our students to start the year by identifying their personal Hopes and

Dreams, we must also consider our institutional goals and aspirations. It’s been uplifting and exciting work.

Throughout all of the planning conversations, one thing remained clear: We still believe that our mission should drive all that we do. As you review our plan, you will note that it is anchored around our mission, as well as Financial Health, and Academics.

I’m excited about what’s to come and I want to invite our entire community to get to know the Plan and be involved. You are an important partner in the future success of Wissahickon Charter School, and we can only do this with your help. I look forward to working together to realize this vision.

Warmly,
Kristi Littell, CEO