



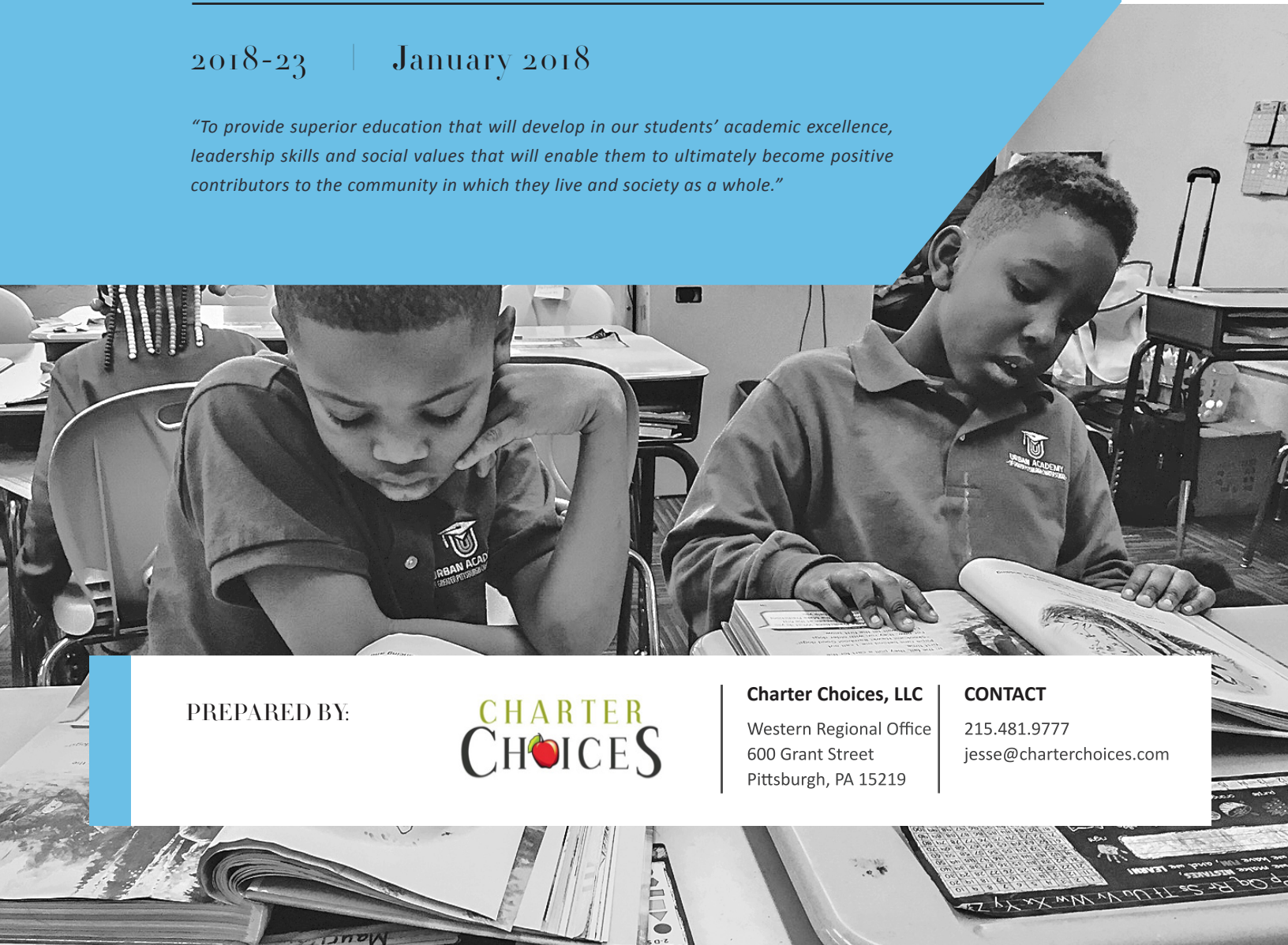
URBAN ACADEMY
— OF GREATER PITTSBURGH CHARTER SCHOOL —

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Strategic Plan

2018-23 | January 2018

"To provide superior education that will develop in our students' academic excellence, leadership skills and social values that will enable them to ultimately become positive contributors to the community in which they live and society as a whole."



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Purpose & Background

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Our Story



Originally founded in 1998 as the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh Charter School, the now independent Urban Academy of Greater Pittsburgh Charter School (“Urban Academy”) was an early pioneer in the Pittsburgh school choice movement, and has served as a beacon of hope and opportunity for thousands of students and families, the vast majority of whom come from underserved communities across Allegheny County. With a long and distinguished history of outperforming its district and charter school peers, and of eliminating the racial achievement gap (particularly in 3rd-5th grade literacy), Urban Academy has consistently delivered on its mission:

“To provide superior education that will develop in our students’ academic excellence, leadership skills and social values that will enable them to ultimately become positive contributors to the community in which they live and society as a whole.”

Since its rebirth in 2015 under a new name, a new board of directors, and a newly enhanced building (with 10,000 additional square feet), the school has honored its legacy of Afrocentric pedagogy (now reframed as “Black 2 the Core”) and “Excellence Without Compromise”, cultivating in its young scholars a deep sense of agency and pride in their culture and identity. In leading the school through its recent transition, the school’s leadership and board affirmed its commitment to the community by looking to minority and female-owned construction, architectural and project management firms for support in reclaiming an outdated school building and “giving it back”.

In addition to its fervent commitment to educational equity and opportunity for all children, Urban Academy’s academic program boasts a number of distinguishing features:

Extended School Day (7:30AM-3:10PM) and School Year (199 Days)

STREAM

Science, Technology, Robotics, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics, embodied in its current efforts to develop the first STREAM Center in the City of Pittsburgh.

Whole Child

All students in grades K-5 receive instruction in Art, Music, Spanish, PE/Dancing, Chess, Computers and access to a Maker Space.

Technology Integration

Each classroom is equipped with a SMART Board, and the school offers students a 1:1 ratio for Chromebooks, which can be found in every classroom.

Recognition

Deemed a “model of success”, Urban Academy has been lauded for its innovation and commitment by its authorizers (Pittsburgh Public Schools, Middle States Association Commission on Elementary and Secondary Schools), and by independent voices and advocates like A+ Schools and PennCAN..

Community Partnerships

Through the support of its friends, old and new, at Gateway Health, the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Larimer Consensus Group, Grow Pittsburgh, Little Medical School, Assemble Scholars, and the National Society of Black Engineers, the school has afforded its students and families unique social and academic opportunities, such as classroom projects linked to community revitalization efforts, access to world-class professional development for staff, and funding for innovative afterschool enrichment.

Our Process

Despite its track record of success, the new leadership and board of Urban Academy sees the 2017-18 school year as an opportune moment for reflection, self-evaluation, goal-setting and looking ahead toward a new 5-Year Vision for the Future (2018-23). Building upon the success of CEO Chase Patterson's Entry Plan Report (in January 2017), the Board has retained Charter Choices, LLC (its business services provider since 2016, with operations in Glenside and Pittsburgh, PA), to engage with every stakeholder group (teachers, staff, students, families, board members and administrators) to gather input on the school's internal systems (strengths, weaknesses) and external environment (opportunities, threats), to present these findings to the community (via Mr. Patterson's Annual Report in January 2018), and to recommend a strategic pathway to achieving a clear set of goals and outcomes for the next five years.

In the pages that follow, the team at Charter Choices outlines its findings in four key areas:

-
- ✓ Academic Program
 - ✓ Performance and Accountability
 - ✓ Finances and Operations
 - ✓ Governance and Community Relations



Each section includes a high-level overview of the school's strengths and growth areas, and sets concrete goals and action plans for addressing the apparent gap between current and desired outcomes. The report then provides a set of five-year financial projections, and a comprehensive set of Metrics and Measures, including a Strategic Plan Dashboard that can be leveraged by the board and leadership to establish and track goals, evaluate performance and celebrate progress in the years ahead. Finally, the report explores external conditions that might foster (opportunities) and/or inhibit (threats) the school's stated desire for expansion (first to K-8, then K-12 by 2021) and growth (STREAM Center, K-8 Campus Format), and suggests strategic moves the school might enact to mitigate these risks and establish contingencies.

Our Process (cont.)

As Charter Choices met with nearly 50 stakeholders – groups of teachers, staff, board members, families, administrators and students - and observed classrooms in action, a series of interrelated questions began to surface – questions this report will seek to address:

- How well is the school actually meeting the needs of all students, and how effective is its approach to differentiation, Student Education Plans, and competency-based instruction?
- What does a 21st-century approach to Afrocentric instruction look like, and how can the school best integrate its various commitments to project-based learning, preparing students for careers in the STREAM industries, and its time-honored “Black 2 the Core” educational philosophy?
- How well is the school adjusting to the demands of the new, Common Core-aligned PSSA test? How will it address apparent gaps in literacy and numeracy, particularly among newly matriculated students in its middle/upper grades?
- What is the impact of increased enrollment, new programmatic initiatives and physical expansion on school culture, resource allocation, teacher capacity and satisfaction? How can the school mitigate the risk of staff turnover and burnout, and ensure long-term investment in the community and its children?
- Is the school’s long-term vision for a K-8 Campus financially viable? How can it secure the finances and influence to make its dream a reality?
- In addition to its long-standing partners, what other individuals and organizations might be a natural fit for the school’s vision of serving as a hub of community innovation and resources – a 21st-century, STREAM facility that offers a wide range of services to students – and just as importantly – to their families?
- How might the board composition and committee work be realigned to meet the needs outlined in this report, including the need for fundraising, grants, and other public-private partnerships?

At the request of Urban Academy’s Board and CEO, Charter Choices has prepared this report to help members of the Urban community – families, staff members, donors, community partners and others – to understand the planning process and the strategic actions it will be taking over the next five years in support of its shared vision. Our sincerest hope is that this document provides readers with the information needed to track the organization’s growth, and become active cheerleaders and participants in preparing the school and its students for success in the 21st Century.

Current Reality

SECTION
02

Our Values

URBAN ACADEMY OF GREATER PITTSBURGH CHARTER SCHOOL



FOCUSED ON EQUITY

We increase learning opportunities for all students, regardless of background.



LED BY OUR TEACHERS

We afford teachers the opportunity to be responsible for the educational program.



DEFINED BY CHOICE & INNOVATION

We provide parents and students with expanded choices within the public school system.



ACCOUNTABLE FOR RESULTS

We are accountable for meeting measurable student outcomes.



Our Program

What are Our Strengths?

Urban Academy's historical success can be attributed to a constellation of factors: small class sizes, a close-knit community with relationships built on respect, a skilled and dedicated team of educators, a safe and inclusive environment, and a culturally-responsive approach to instructional design. The school is in the midst of an instructional renaissance, as it has refocused on STREAM (Science, Technology, Robotics, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) instruction for all K-5 students, full technology integration (1:1 Chromebooks in every classroom) that empowers students to actively produce knowledge rather than simply acquire it passively, a hands-on approach to project based learning that utilizes centers and workshops throughout the day, a culture of reading (Reading Wonders, guided reading groups, early intervention using Foundations, DRA and Dibels), and accountability for the success of all learners (Class Dojo, Equity Sticks, data charts posted).

Staff, students and families express faith in the leadership of the school and appreciate their transparent approach to decision-making and community-building. Students feel supported by their teachers, inspired by their Principal and CEO, and generally safe and cared for (Urban teachers were observed using a 3-2-1 protocol to practice safe and polite transitions between classes). The hallways are quiet, clean, filled with evidence of students' creativity and ingenuity, and illustrative of a deep commitment to African American art, history, and cultural pride. A full 75% of all staff at the school are African American themselves, and they lead students in regular pride call and response and Weekly Gatherings where the community honors its legacy even as it forges a new identity in its new home. Through its "Black 2 the Core" approach, the staff leads students in examining American history and culture critically, from the Middle Passage to Emancipation, the Civil Rights Movement and the modern day experience. Rather than taking the day off, students repurpose Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as an opportunity for social action and community service.

Finally, the school is committed to restorative practices – even as it maintains rigid expectations for student behavior, it prohibits suspension (except in the most extreme circumstances), and seeks to understand and address the underlying factors (academic, social, economic, emotional) that contribute to a student's behavior, with the goal of restoring her/him to the Urban community above all else.

What are Our Growth Areas?

1. Reading Wonders

While staff is confident in the selection of Reading Wonders and Foundations as the school's approach to balanced literacy and intervention, there is widespread recognition of the need for professional development that targets discrete reading strategies which can be readily implemented.

Recommended Actions:

- Build a Professional Development plan that targets literacy intervention strategies and reinforces these through coaching, peer observation and implementation walkthroughs.
- Establish Tier 3 intervention plan, to include small group and 1:1 literacy intervention before and after school, perhaps through an established partner like Springboard Collaborative.

2. Professional Development

Teachers were grateful for the Teaching Academy that was planned and delivered by administrators in August, and expressed a desire for more frequent, regular opportunity for capacity-building and collaboration with peers.

Recommended Actions:

- Modify the 2018-19 calendar and schedule to include weekly early release or delayed start for students, and craft a comprehensive PD calendar that includes year-long goals (focus on differentiation and classroom management strategies), broken down into weekly topics and outcomes, to include teacher and administrator-led sessions (with protocols for looking at student work, designing curriculum and projects, new research and strategies, etc.). If weekly PD is not possible, consider longer bi-weekly or monthly sessions in support of 2-3 concrete, yearlong academic and/or school culture goals.
- Establish an Instructional Leadership Team (teacher leaders by grade level or grade level bands), led by the Chief Academic Officer, to meet bi-weekly and develop/manage the PD plan and establish and publish a clear set of non-negotiable teaching practices (what we expect to see in every Urban Academy classroom during walkthroughs) in order to reduce variability of quality and implementation from classroom-to-classroom (in terms of HW expectations, literacy proficiency, cultural relevance, strictness of discipline, use of technology).

3. Math Instruction

Teachers appreciate the flexibility they have been given historically in selecting math curriculum, and are grateful that the school is actively researching a single provider for 2018-19.

Recommended Actions:

- Pilot and select a problem-based math curriculum that is CCSS-aligned – ideally one with an online enrichment/intervention platform that gives students the opportunity to self-pace toward mastery of content and skills.

- Build a math component into the 2018-19 PD plan, introducing teachers to a “Math Workshop” approach that builds inductive reasoning skills and a deeper approach to problem-solving.
- Create a “HW Zone” for before/after school math support, and consider applying for a 21st Century Grant to pay for this (along with STEM enrichment clubs/activities).

4. Project Based Learning

A number of stakeholder groups expressed commitment to and enthusiasm for the school’s plan to engage students in meaningful, relevant, project-based work. Based on conversations with staff and observations of classroom instruction, it is clear that some work remains in gaining clarity on what high-quality PBL looks like in design and in implementation.

Recommended Actions:

- Research and adopt a common design approach to PBL (consider using the Buck Institute for Education, High Tech High, Expeditionary Learning, etc.), conduct PD and build this approach into the school’s observation/supervision model.
- Create a PBL Design Team comprised of teachers and administrators, offer stipends and conference opportunities, and have this group lead colleagues in the piloting of a single, grade-wide project for 2018-19 (with capacity and expectations scaled up in subsequent years), and the redesign of the daily schedule to support additional investigation and project time.
- Create or adopt a Social Studies curriculum map that is based on PA standards (draws on the Standards Aligned System) and integrates 1-2 full projects/year. Ensure this map reflect a sequence that includes US, PA and Local (Pittsburgh) History and Geography in Grades K-5, along with World History in Grades 6-8.

5. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Despite the school’s stated commitment to equity, Afrocentrism and culturally-responsive teaching (“Black 2 the Core”), a gap persists in terms of staff, student and parent perceptions, and these groups raised contrasting concerns as to the appropriateness of its disciplinary code (and a perceived rigidity of expectations and consequences).

Recommended Actions:

- Update hallway and exterior wall hangings to reflect current student projects.
- Regularly communicate Afrocentric programming and instruction via Twitter feed (#black2thecore), Facebook and web postings (images, video, press releases), and communicate rationale for approach (and changes, such as uniforms) via CEO/CAO letters.
- Convene Joint Parent-Teacher Task Force to research and make recommendations on updating disciplinary policies and practices (with consideration given to cultural relevance, need for movement, noise and play, multiple learning styles, cradle-to-prison pipeline, etc.)
- Host monthly community events that focus on multiculturalism, community service, Afrocentric arts, music, and culture.

6. Enrollment & School Culture

Urban Academy has always been a small, supportive environment, but the recent enrollment spike has presented challenges in terms of building and sustaining a strong school culture (both with students and their families).

Recommended Actions:

- Create a daily Advisory System (called CREW, Family Groups, etc.) so that teachers “own” relationships with students and families for a designated small subset of students. Rather than each teacher being responsible for parent communication for an entire grade level, this would distribute responsibility across a greater number of adults (including admin and non-instructional staff), all of whom would take ownership over student success.
- Conduct intake interviews for all new students (using a Behavior Contract that has been developed by the school), provide “buddies” for all new students and a special 1-day August orientation prior to the arrival of returning students.

7. STREAM House & Initiatives

All stakeholder groups enthusiastically support the CEO and Board’s vision of a STREAM house, but cite the need for capacity-building to ensure that teachers are equipped to utilize the space and understand the vision for its application and use.

Recommended Action:

- Research (or visit) the Bronx Green Machine, take local visits to school-based Maker Spaces, and provide PD to teachers on STREAM learning across the curriculum. Establish clear, multi-year implementation expectations (i.e., all teachers will design X projects in collaboration with the STREAM House, to include regular visits and showcase student work products).



Our Performance

What are Our Strengths?

Urban Academy has historically outperformed its district and charter school counterparts, effectively closing the racial achievement gap. The school has expressed a longstanding commitment to meeting the needs of all students, a reality now embodied in its interim assessment and fledgling intervention program. Through STAR 360, Dibels, and PSSA practice assessments, teachers have the ability to establish baseline data on every student in the school (including struggling early and struggling readers), identify students in need of support, track progress, and offer flexible grouping and targeted Tier 1 and 2 interventions. The school's leadership is focused on building teacher capacity around differentiation, delivering high quality special education services to students with IEPs, and creating a culture of data and transparency among its staff, board (through the School Affairs Committee) and families.

Academic Year	PPS 2015-16	Urban Academy 2015-16	PPS 2016-17	Urban Academy 2016-17
SPP SCORE		48.3		60.4
Schoolwide Math Proficiency (%)	27.28	28.44	26.61	25.71
Schoolwide Science Proficiency (%)	45.65	60.61	44.89	68.57
Schoolwide ELA Proficiency (%)	40.58	47.71	43.95	50

What are Our Growth Areas?

i. Structures to Support Assessment

Despite the range of assessments already in use, the school cannot rebound from the adverse impacts of the new PSSA test without a robust data strategy that is aligned to schoolwide goals and tied to the school's capacity-building efforts.

Suggested Actions:

- Establish a Data Team, comprised of teachers, administrators, a parent and board member (or consider expanding the School Affairs Committee to address this need). Set schoolwide and grade level growth goals, and track performance quarterly through a Data Dashboard (should reflect standard metrics,

comparative metrics, along with portfolio assessment indicators per the Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA).

- Integrate use of data in teacher PD (perhaps utilize a data coach/consultant as needed), utilize Data Walls in hallways, put data in the hands of students and have them set growth goals.

2. Parents as Data Partners

Parents feel informed regarding their child's academic performance, appreciate the school's transparency, and look forward to hearing more about the school's plans at the upcoming Parent Academy. However, parents and students are passive recipients of information rather than genuine partners in school improvement efforts.

Suggested Actions:

- Establish Student Led Conferences where students reflect on growth and performance and effectively "own" their own learning. Teachers can use these conferences to share intervention and enrichment opportunities and explain how RtII works in practice
- Create a Performance Assessment System where students' project work is assessed via digital portfolios and a culminating defense of learning (in 5th and 8th grades, for example) called a "21st Century Readiness System" or a "Next Generation Success Portfolio", etc.
- Share Information via Apps (such as Remind or PDE's Early Warning System) that promote proactivity and engagement on the part of families, identify early trends in academics and behavior, and allow for two-way communication and feedback.



Our Resources

What are Our Strengths?

All stakeholders at the school express a high degree of confidence in the school's operational infrastructure (including human capital systems), and parents are particularly satisfied with the measures the school has undertaken to ensure student safety (single entrance/exit, security cameras, clean hallways and classrooms, sign-in and sign-out processes). Teachers cite a much-improved level of trust and communication with administrators, and express increased job satisfaction, feeling as though they "have a voice" and will "not be blackballed when offering criticism", and acknowledging that their administrators regularly show appreciation for their hard work on behalf of children ("game balls at meetings", "verbal feedback and notes"). They are generally positive when describing their administrators ("I feel like I'm part of a team now," and "Our leaders want to see us shine"), and feel both respected and entrusted with the freedom to craft instruction to fit the needs of their students.

The CEO, Mr. Patterson, has earned the respect of the community for his outstanding commitment to children and their families, and takes seriously his position as a role model (particularly for young men of color). Mr. Patterson has a son at Urban's preschool, a fact which speaks volumes to stakeholders regarding his belief in the school and his integrity (as one parent indicated, "If the school's good enough for his son, it's good enough for mine"). Board members cite their strong approval ("Chase has been a breath of fresh air") for the senior leadership team of Patterson (CEO), Drakeford (CAO) and Coney (COO). According to one board member, "Since Chase took over, it's been night and day, and that's increased attendance and interest in the school, helped us attract and retain better teachers. They are always thinking about what's best for the students and staff, and we trust in their leadership in every area." This extends to academics, where Mr. Patterson has entrusted the duties of instructional leadership (CAO and Principal) to Mrs. Angelique Drakeford, a highly regarded and successful teacher at the school for many years.

The school's financial controls and operational systems are fully detailed in its board policies (which are updated regularly and vetted by retained counsel), enrollment has risen by 30% since the new administration began, and the school has seen a healthy increase in its revenue (via preschool services, enrollment increase, and early stage fundraising) and fund balance. The school's leadership is aggressively working to retain its best teachers, offering two-year contracts to reduce anxiety, and expressing a desire to bring salary levels in line with district and charter school peers.

"We have the utmost faith in the leadership, transparency and commitment of our CEO and his team. The vision and passion is infectious and inspiring." – Board Member

What are Our Growth Areas?

1. Teachers Academy

While staff appreciates the thoughtful approach to August professional development (and the two-week “buffer” to prepare for the arrival of students), there is a general sense that the workshops could be better aligned with teacher needs and differentiated based on level of expertise and tenure at the school.

Suggested Actions:

- Form a small committee (utilize new Instructional Leadership Team, for example) in June to work with administrators to gather teacher input via survey (as was done in Spring 2017) and plan the 2018 Teacher Academy accordingly.
- Organize the Teachers Academy into “Academic” and “Operational” segments by day (or half-day), offer differentiated components on the operational pieces (workshops for new teachers facilitated by veteran educators at the school), and/or a pre-Teacher Academy Orientation (1-2 days) for all new hires, focused on basic school-day operations, non-instructional duties and classroom setup assistance.

2. Enrollment Challenges

Enrollment staff and administrators cite difficulty in securing files for transfer students, particularly those coming from Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Suggested Actions:

- Designate “File Pickup Days” where the school lines up volunteer coverage for enrollment staff, who are assigned the task of physically traveling to the district’s student records office (and other charter schools in the city) to request and retrieve documentation in person.
- Designate “Summer Testing Window” (late June, early July) to assess all incoming students’ reading and math levels (rather than waiting until September), assign intervention and/or evaluation services as needed, and flag potential file requests during the early part of summer.

3. Outdoor Play Space

While the school enjoys a bright and colorful learning environment, including a cafeteria, students do not have a recess yard or space for outdoor game time and socialization.

Suggested Actions:

- Build play space into the Campus Expansion Plans. In the interim, consider converting the “Dinosaur Area” into a smaller play space, or lease the adjacent brownfield from the city (behind the empty church building). Invite parents into the planning process for these items.
- In response to student interests (and the addition of middle grades), broaden opportunities for extracurricular engagement (Flag Football, Cheerleading, Mock Trial, Coding, Chess, etc.).

4. Salary Comparison

In order to fulfill its goal of retaining high-quality teachers and staff, the administration and board will need to commit funds to remaining regionally competitive and planning for salary increases in the years to come. Similarly, it will need to commence budget modeling for intended growth and capital expansion.

Suggested Actions:

- Create salary schedules for each class of employee, build budget model that accounts for cost of living and other increases, such as for longevity and graduate degrees.
- Establish Urban Academy Foundation (with its own board), including a Director of Development, apply for 21st Century Grant, growth grants sponsored by school choice supporters in Pittsburgh, and university partners to assist through funds and/or faculty to advise/teach.
- Establish a Capital Campaign, name a committee chair, conduct a feasibility study, and initiate a quiet phase with an aggressive public campaign to follow. All three of these initiatives (salary, foundation, capital campaign) should be tied to a 5-year budget projection, created in partnership with the team at Charter Choices.

5. Leadership Development

While Mr. Patterson serves as an effective supervisor and coach for his senior leadership team (Mrs. Drakeford and Mr. Coney), he would benefit from an executive thought partner who has (ideally) successfully built and expanded a charter school in Pittsburgh already.

Suggested Actions:

- Establish a line item for Mr. Patterson’s own professional development, to include hiring an Executive Coach, conference fees and travel for at least one event/year, membership in regional, state or national networks of school leaders, and/or graduate coursework.
- As described earlier, establish an Instructional Leadership Team, and identify teacher leaders to serve on this team (observe peers and provide informal coaching/support, assist admin in planning events and developing policy, develop and facilitate PD). Designate a stipend for each member of the team.
- Hire an additional Instructional Coach or Supervisor to support Mrs. Drakeford in administering assessments, coaching and evaluating staff, planning professional development, and executing various administrative tasks (including student discipline, as necessary).

6. Expansion Planning

Mr. Patterson has, in concert with the board and design vendors, articulated a clear vision for expansion, including program enhancement, construction projects, and public financing. The community has expressed widespread support, but wants to ensure that leadership is prepared to follow a deliberate, phased roadmap over the next 5 years.

Suggested Actions:

- Develop an Expansion Committee (perhaps using the same name as that chosen for this Strategic Plan and for the Capital Campaign – “Campaign for Urban 2023”, for instance, perhaps with an Afrocentric or culturally-relevant theme) comprised of staff, families, board members and administrators (with student advisors) to create plans for all aspects of Urban’s future, from bell schedules to flexible classroom space to playground design to middle school uniforms.
- Utilize January 10th Annual Meeting to launch Strategic Vision, share high-level 5-year growth plan (see “Metrics and Measures” section that follows), and announce Expansion Committee recruitment process to all stakeholders.

Our Community

What are Our Strengths?

Throughout its history, Urban Academy has enjoyed a strong and engaged Board of Directors, a generous donor and partner base, and a supportive group of parents and family members. Its board composition is diverse and well-suited to the school's current and future needs – higher education, STEM, research, public affairs, real estate, law, business, among other fields. Board members are dedicated, eager to serve, and motivated by seeing all students succeed - particularly those furthest from opportunity.

Similarly, the school has a newly launched Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) that meets twice a month, and has a passionate group of parent leaders who have already initiated fundraising and social gathering events (such as the Family Business Fair in January 2018).

Working in tandem with the board and parents, Mr. Patterson has brokered strong partnerships with local businesses and organizations, including the Healing Garden and the National Society of Black Engineers, which co-hosts the Summer Engineering Experience for Kids (SEEK) program for students across the greater Pittsburgh area.

What are Our Growth Areas?

1. Board Visibility & Involvement

While stakeholders appreciate the volunteer leadership and efforts of Urban's Board, they remain largely unknown to staff, family and students.

Suggested Actions:

- Create a G-Drive Calendar for Board Members to sign up to attend school events and visit classrooms (minimum 1x/year per board member), and invite board members to formally recognize teachers ("Teacher of the Month/Year", Longevity Plaques, serve lunch on Teacher Appreciation Day, etc.) publicly.
- Invite 1-2 staff members to present achievements at each board meeting, and allow board members to publicly acknowledge their contributions and service.
- Have board review annual Parent Satisfaction survey, have Board President (and/or others) attend 2 PTO meetings/year to introduce themselves and gather feedback for board consideration with school leadership.
- Hold a monthly "Coffee with Chase", whereby the CEO is accompanied by one board member per session, providing parents a forum for small group discussion, Q&A on the expansion, etc.

2. Parent-Teacher Partnership

Parents speak glowingly about teacher quality and commitment to students, and teachers express optimism regarding the vision for the school's new PTO. However, both parties express a strong desire to work together more effectively and with greater regularity.

Suggested Actions:

- PTO leadership and teachers coordinate a "Classroom Parent" program, where one parent per classroom serves as an "extra set of hands" with student reading groups (perhaps 1x/week), classroom activities and socials, as well as field trips.
- Form a Teacher Appreciation Committee of the PTO to develop opportunities for recognition and introduction throughout the year.
- Set up a G-Drive Sign-Up for teachers (1x/month) to attend PTO meetings, introduce themselves and highlight project work, classroom achievements, etc.
- PTO Leadership meet quarterly with school leadership to arrange parent support for school events (job fairs, business/vendor fairs, Career Day, Mom Prom and Daddy-Daughter Tea, fundraising activities such as student art mugs/t-shirts, etc.).

3. Board Committee Structure

The board's committee structure has historically been effective in providing oversight and support around the various aspects of school operations (finance, facilities, HR, school affairs, executive oversight). However, the school's recent transition, current strategic planning process, and imminent expansion provide a unique opportunity for reorganization and realignment with its goals moving forward.

Suggested Action:

- Reorganize Board Committees to reflect major categories of the Strategic Plan:

Strategic Plan Category	Previous Committee(s)	Proposed Committee	Committee Function
Academic Program & Design	School Affairs	School Performance	PBL, 21 st Century Program Design
Performance & Accountability	School Affairs	School Performance	Data Systems & Reporting
Finance & Operations	Finance, HR	Finance	Finances, Human Capital (salary, benefits, recruitment/retention)
Governance & Community Relations	Executive	Executive	Board Recruitment, Board Policy, CEO Oversight
5-Year Expansion	Facilities	Real Estate	Facilities financing, contracting with PM, Architect, GC, etc.
	N/A	Capital Campaign	Fundraising for capital expansion, additional hires and program enhancement

4. Fundraising

As the school moves with deliberation toward its expansion, it becomes increasingly important to identify a new generation of donors and community partners who will champion and support the school's vision in the years ahead. Given the school's roots in the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh (and departure in 2015), the school faces an urgent challenge in recruiting board members who can make introductions to social and professional networks of similar means and influence.

Suggested Actions:

- Establish Urban Academy Foundation (separate board, will own the school campus and lease to UAGPCS), and budget for the recruitment and hiring of a full time Director of Development by 2020 who can manage and lead both Annual Fund and Capital Campaign efforts.
- Launch a formal Capital Campaign in 2018 (see #4 above under "Finances and Operations").
- Establish a clear "Give or Get" expectation for board members, and task the new Director of Development with training board members on "Friend-raising" and "Crowdsourcing" strategies.
- Set clear goals for new board member recruitment (2 per year, 2018-20), targeting Capital Campaign and Expansion planning needs.

5. External Relations

Mr. Patterson, as a lifelong resident of Pittsburgh and leader in the community, has made considerable inroads in building a network of local partners and advocates for the school's expansion plans. In order to achieve the ambitious plans outlined above, he and the board will need to formalize these efforts with an eye toward board and donor recruitment.

Suggested Actions:

- Establish an Urban Academy Advisory Council comprised of neighborhood partners (civic leaders, pastors, business owners, etc.) that will convene 2x/year for a luncheon featuring student hosts and performers, speeches by current board members, and opportunities to provide valuable counsel to the school (and for the school, conversely, to solicit major gifts, court institutional donors, and recruit volunteers).
- Establish a Student-Led Reading Program (for example) that pairs current Urban Academy students with elderly volunteers (from assisted living and retirement communities) to serve as "Classroom Grandparents" and readers 1x/week. Assign the Director of Development to recruit volunteers, oversee the program, and establish fundraising and estate planning opportunities for interested seniors.
- Approach city leadership (mayor, council), news media and Pittsburgh Public Schools with vision of being a "Community School" (open from 6AM to 10PM, providing food, job training, social services, technology training) and solicit major partners (university, health system, corporate).

"They push us here; they don't
ever let us stop doing our best."
- 4th Grade Student

Strategic Vision

SECTION
03

Our Desired Future

By the Fall of 2023, Urban Academy of Greater Pittsburgh Charter School will be the premier K-8 STREAM learning organization in the city of Pittsburgh. It will prepare each and every student -regardless of background - for success in the 21st Century global economy, with a particular focus on the applied sciences (engineering, robotics, coding, design, etc.). Featuring state-of-the-art classrooms, facilities and resources on a sprawling, urban campus, Urban Academy will extend deep roots into the community, and offer a full slate of community services to its families and neighbors.



Priorities

In order to achieve this desired future state within 5 years, Urban Academy will execute a strategic vision grounded in four priority areas: Programs, Accountability, Resources, and Community. The pages that follow provide a “roadmap” to success, an action plan that articulates specific goals in each area, along with concrete action steps (short, mid and long-term) to achieving them.



Programs

BECOME AN INCUBATOR OF K-8 INNOVATION AND DESIGN, AND INSPIRE THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF OUR CITY, PARTICULARLY THOSE FURTHEST FROM OPPORTUNITY.

GOALS

- 1 // Prepare our students for success in the 21st century Academy and marketplace of ideas through innovative, student-centered, project-based instruction.
- 2 // Build a distinctive curricular focus around the stem subjects, while integrating art and robotics (STREAM), to align our graduate profile to opportunities present in the emerging regional economy (materials science, applied math, artificial intelligence, biomedical research, etc.).
- 3 // Recommit ourselves to the work of culturally relevant, equity-focused, Afrocentric pedagogy in a way that honors our past and creates a legacy for the future
- 4 // Even as we invest in new programs, make a corollary investment in the skills and capacity of Urban Academy's teaching professionals through world-class, differentiated, learner-centered professional development and coaching.

Prepare our students for success in the 21st century Academy and marketplace of ideas through innovative, student-centered, project-based instruction.

YEAR 1

- Create Project Design Team
- Establish "PBL Implementation Plan"
- Select PBL design template and professional development provider

YEAR 2

- Revise/update K-5 Curriculum Map to integrate 1-2 major projects per year in each subject area
- Host Exhibition Nights (Fall/Spring) to highlight projects/products publicly

YEARS 3-5

- Tie Curriculum Map to 21st Century Assessment System (Portfolio Defense)

Build a distinctive curricular focus around the stem subjects, while integrating art and robotics (STREAM), to align our graduate profile to opportunities present in the emerging regional economy (materials science, applied math, artificial intelligence, biomedical research, etc.).

YEAR 1

- Select a single, problem-based math curriculum with an online, mastery-based component.
- Train all teachers on Chromebook math enrichment/intervention platform
- Construct STREAM House and open for K-5 use

YEAR 2

- Visit school-based Maker Spaces and STREAM programs (i.e., Bronx Green Machine) to calibrate best practices
- Tie math curriculum map to projects designed for other disciplines.

YEARS 3-5

- Hire Grant Coordinator, implement grant programs (“STREAM Zone”, “HW Lab”, Summer STREAM Camp, etc.)
- Apply for 21st Century Grant for before/after school STREAM enrichment

Recommit ourselves to the work of culturally relevant, equity-focused, Afrocentric pedagogy in a way that honors our past and creates a legacy for the future.

YEAR 1

- Convene joint Parent-Teacher Equity Task Force to advise CEO/Board on Code of Conduct concerns and research-based recommendations
- Create and maintain “#black2thecore” Twitter feed to highlight Afrocentric program highlights in real time

YEAR 2

- Create daily Advisory System (i.e. CREW) to build relationships, culture, reinforce Black2theCore philosophy

YEARS 3-5

- Conduct intake interviews for all new students as school expands enrollment
- Develop Orientation Program for all new students (Behavior Contract, 1:1 Buddies, etc.)

Even as we invest in new programs, make a corollary investment in the skills and capacity of Urban Academy's teaching professionals through world-class, differentiated, learner-centered professional development and coaching.

YEAR 1

- Modify school calendar and weekly schedule to include weekly early release (or late arrival) for teacher PD
- Develop PD Plan that focuses on improvement goals (around literacy, PBL, equity, STREAM, etc.) and combines delivery methods (traditional "seat time" PD, asynchronous webinars, online course packs, lesson study with peers, portfolio submission)
- Establish Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) to assist CAO with instructional improvement efforts, peer observation/coaching, facilitation of PD

YEAR 2

- Establish Tier 3 Intervention Plan (1:1 and small group support) led by ILT and Data Team members (see "Data Team", Goal #1 under "Accountability")
- Hold bi-weekly meetings to review and update intervention strategies for struggling readers and mathematicians

YEARS 3-5

- Evaluate success of Tiered Intervention model, research alternatives and course-correct as needed (earmark funds for external partnerships, i.e. Springboard Collaborative)

"Our teachers know that everyone has something to contribute, something that they know, so that it's a happier learning environment for everybody. I like my teacher - she lets everybody get a chance, because we're all one classroom and we have to work together." – 4th Grade Student

Accountability

CREATE A CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT THAT DEFINES STUDENT SUCCESS IN BROADER, MORE HOLISTIC TERMS THAN A SINGLE TEST SCORE.

GOALS

- 1 //** Build internal systems (for teachers and administrators) that promote data literacy, inform resource allocation and decision-making, and drive instructional improvement..
- 2 //** Empower students to become “leaders of their own learning”, goal-setters who use data to chart a path forward toward success in all aspects of their life and education.
- 3 //** Engage parents and families as partners in their children’s success by creating opportunities for data-driven conferences, student-led portfolio defenses, and cloud-based collaboration with teachers.

Build internal systems (for teachers and administrators) that promote data literacy, inform resource allocation and decision-making, and drive instructional improvement.

YEAR 1

- Build Data Dashboard to track academic performance, behavioral indicators and project/portfolio-based assessments
- Establish Data Team (and/or expand School Affairs Committee) to set goals and track schoolwide progress
- Integrate use of data in teacher PD

YEAR 2

- Create Data Wall for every grade level
- Update Data Dashboard as needed

YEARS 3-5

- Introduce celebrations for data-based achievements (recognize growth milestones, admin hosts PSSA Party)
- Hire Math and Reading Coordinators (as resources permit) to manage data and lead intervention efforts

Empower students to become “leaders of their own learning”, goal-setters who use data to chart a path forward toward success in all aspects of their life and education.

YEAR 1

- Develop plan for Student-Led Conferences (“SLCs”) in Fall, including reflection prompts/template
- Pilot SLCs in Spring 2019 at designated grade levels/classrooms

YEAR 2

- Implement SLCs at all grade levels/classrooms in Fall 2019

YEARS 3-5

- Maintain SLCs, refine as needed

Engage parents and families as partners in their children’s success by creating opportunities for data-driven conferences, student-led portfolio defenses, and cloud-based collaboration with teachers.

YEAR 1

- Establish Urban Academy Graduate Profile
- Design 21st Century Assessment System (link PBL products to Grad Profile and competency-based Portfolio Defense)

YEAR 2

- Conduct teacher training/PD on competency-based portfolio assessment
- Implement Portfolio Defenses in 5th Grade (as pilot)
- Launch parent engagement platform (Remind App, PowerSchool Parent Portal) to promote two-way communication)

YEARS 3-5

- Implement Portfolio Defenses in Grade 8

“I appreciate that the school emphasizes African American history and culture, that my children develop a sense of pride in who they are, where they’ve come from, and the many role models they have to look up to in the black community. – Urban Academy Parent

Resources

MANAGE AND DEPLOY PEOPLE, SPACE, MONEY AND TIME FOR SHORT-TERM GROWTH AND LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY.

GOALS

- I //** Attract, recruit and retain the city's finest team of educators by ensuring their compensation and benefits are aligned to their charter and district peers.
- 2 //** Build a career ladder for top-performers through a distributed leadership model with embedded incentives and opportunities for added challenge and responsibility.
- 3 //** Invest in the continued growth of key administrators through executive coaching, regional networks, conferences and graduate study, as well as adding complimentary administrative roles to support greater efficiency and retention.
- 4 //** Develop a comprehensive plan for phased expansion to a full K-8 school model, to be housed on a multi-structure urban campus by Fall 2023.

Attract, recruit and retain the city's finest team of educators by ensuring their compensation and benefits are aligned to their charter and district peers.

YEAR 1

- Conduct "Stay Interviews" with all staff, January 2018
- Establish salary baseline using comparable organizations
- Draft FY19 Budget with updated salary assumptions, based on 5-year model

YEAR 2

- Implement revised salary schedule
- Gather data on staff satisfaction with benefits package
- Revise benefits package accordingly

YEARS 3-5

- Revise schedule every 3 years based on cost of living
- Issue updated employee benefits package
- Budget for increased tuition reimbursement for staff members
- Update 5-year budget model (2021-26)

Build a career ladder for top-performers through a distributed leadership model with embedded incentives and opportunities for added challenge and responsibility.

YEAR 1

- Conduct staff survey to identify interests, strengths, career aspirations
- Build plan for Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), recruit and train team
- Hold ILT Summer 2018 Retreat

YEAR 2

- ILT leads Teacher Academy, with differentiated New Staff Orientation
- ILT meets bi-weekly, manages PD Plan, assists Admin as required

YEARS 3-5

- Develop and execute strategy for Urban Academy Fellows Program (partnership with IHEs for pre-service pipeline)
- Develop “Master Teacher” employee category (stipend/raise for exceptional performance, “Open/Lab Classroom” for peer observation and coaching)

Invest in the continued growth of key administrators through executive coaching, regional networks, conferences and graduate study, as well as adding complimentary administrative roles to support greater efficiency and retention.

YEAR 1

- Adjust budget assumptions to include Instructional Coach or Asst. Principal
- Recruit, hire, train additional administrator
- Create line item for “Leadership PD”

YEAR 2

- CEO incorporates briefing on use of Leadership PD funds in annual report
- Update Org Chart, conduct HR Audit to assess leadership needs for expansion

YEARS 3-5

- Increase budget assumptions for Leadership PD to allow for graduate study (tuition reimbursement)
- Recruit additional administrators for expansion process as needed

Develop a comprehensive plan for phased expansion to a full K-8 school model, to be housed on a multi-structure urban campus by Fall 2023.

YEAR 1

- Launch “Urban 2023” Strategic Vision in January 2018
- Create and recruit Expansion Committee (cross-stakeholder)
- Expansion Committee meets monthly
- Design phase, financing, hire Owners Rep and General Contractor
- Feasibility study for Capital Campaign, name Campaign Chair

YEAR 2

- Expansion Committee continues meeting, overlaps with Board Committees
- General Contractor hires subs, secures permits; finances finalized, Capital Campaign in quiet phase
- CEO provides written quarterly updates and semi-annual Town Hall presentations on expansion progress

YEARS 3-5

- CEO continues community updates, Capital Campaign in aggressive mode
- Expansion Committee transitions, members move to UA Board, Capital Campaign, UA Foundation Board to sustain expansion leadership
- Hold lottery, conduct summer entry assessment, orientation and enrollment of all new students, Grades K-8
- Groundbreaking ceremony (Summer 2021), phased construction (2021-23), Ribbon-cutting (Fall 2023)



Community

LEVERAGE GOVERNANCE, FUNDRAISING AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS TO ELEVATE URBAN ACADEMY'S PROFILE IN THE COMMUNITY AND POSITION IT FOR EVEN GREATER INFLUENCE

GOALS

- 1** // Increase board members' visibility and engagement with the staff, students and families of Urban Academy, and strengthen parent-teacher partnership.
- 2** // Reorganize the board committee structure to maximize efficiency, align to strategic priorities and enlist ongoing involvement in executing the five-year vision.
- 3** // Establish a robust development function within the organization to drive annual campaigns, a capital campaign, major gift solicitation and institutional fundraising.
- 4** // Formalize and execute an external relations strategy to identify a steady cohort of community partners, advocates, and prospective board members.

Increase board members' visibility and engagement with the staff, students and families of Urban Academy.

YEAR 1

- Establish digital system to organize rotating board visits to school events
- Establish digital system to organize rotating teacher visits to PTO meetings
- PTO recruits "Classroom Parents"
- Establish quarterly meetings of school leadership and PTO

YEAR 2

- Rotate staff through PTO meetings, board through school events
- Board member and CEO co-host monthly coffee sessions for families
- Board Executive Committee reviews Parent Satisfaction Survey annually
- Classroom Parent program (Fall 2018)
- Teacher Appreciation Committee of PTO

YEARS 3-5

- Solicit leadership gift to establish annual board award for outstanding teaching
- Maintain communication structures, adjust as needed

Reorganize the board committee structure to maximize efficiency, align to strategic priorities and enlist ongoing involvement in executing the five-year vision.

YEAR 1

- Board Retreat Winter/Spring 2018
- Consider recommended committee changes, align to Strategic Goals

YEAR 2

- Launch reorganized/expanded committees, Fall 2018
- Launch Ad Hoc Committees to include board members (Capital Campaign, Expansion Committees)

YEARS 3-5

- Dissolve/transition Ad Hoc Committees
- Convene Strategic Planning Committee for next 5-year window, Fall 2023

Establish a robust development function within the organization to drive annual campaigns, a capital campaign, major gift solicitation and institutional fundraising.

YEAR 1

- Establish Urban Academy Foundation, name Board Members
- Hire Director of Development to lead Annual Fund and Capital Campaign
- Board Exec Committee researches best practices, develops Governance Plan

YEAR 2

- Board adopts updated Governance policies, including standard “Give/Get” for Spring 2018
- Establish Board Recruitment Plan (2 members/year from 2019-21)
- Conduct Board Training on alternative fundraising methods (“Friend-raising”, “Crowdsourcing”)

YEARS 3-5

- Recruit and on-board 2 Board Members/year through 2021
- Conduct annual board training on legal/fiduciary responsibilities and goal-setting retreat

Formalize and execute an external relations strategy to identify a steady cohort of community partners, advocates, and prospective board members.

YEAR 1

- Research and develop action plan for Urban Academy Advisory Council
- Launch Advisory Council, Spring 2019
- Launch public campaign for “Urban 2023” (mayor’s office, press, PPS, corporate partners, universities)

YEAR 2

- Solicit major capital and fund gifts from council members and networks
- Council meets 2x/year with CEO, CAO and Board leadership
- Research and develop programs that pair students with elderly volunteers (“Classroom Grandparents”, “Reading Buddies”, etc.)

YEARS 3-5

- Council continues meeting annually
- Transition Advisory Council members to School and Foundation Boards after 2-year terms (Board Pipeline)
- Launch joint program with elderly volunteers, incorporate into Development Plan and Capital Campaign



Success-Tracking Instruments

In an effort to ensure that any strategic actions taken are both effective and aligned to Urban Academy's mission, this plan provides a series of detailed instruments for tracking metrics and progress indicators for the four key areas of organizational health outlined in the previous pages. Charter Choices anticipates working iteratively with the CEO and his advisory team to revise these metrics and update the benchmarks for each goal and strategic action.



Please access the digital attachment (Excel, G-Drive) to this plan to review the following tools:

- Board Committee Planning Doc
- Strategic Plan Metrics Dashboard
- Strategic Plan Implementation Tracker

The dashboard goals and implementation tracker map directly to the categories (and proposed committees) detailed in the narrative, and are similarly organized to demonstrate alignment with the CEO's Entry Plan work published in January 2017. The intent here is to give Urban Academy's leadership and board the infrastructure and tools to customize the plan's recommendations (and integrate with existing initiatives) in ways that will drive improvement and growth, and poise the school for success in its upcoming expansion. The dashboard, in particular, offers specific data points to track progress and performance related to its ambitious priorities and goals. This data can be grouped in three distinct categories – students, stakeholders, and organizational health:

- **Students:** Urban Academy, in line with its commitment to eliminating the racial achievement gap, will set ambitious goals for student performance on a variety of assessments, notably the MAP and PSSA. To supplement academic measures, Urban Academy is also focused on cultivating students' 21st Century skills, such as the 4Cs (Communication, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, and Creativity), to ensure post-secondary success and college persistence.
- **Stakeholders:** The various stakeholders of Urban Academy – students, families, staff, leaders and board – are all essential to the learning process. The organization seeks to invest in high-leverage human capital practices, track teacher retention, capture stakeholder satisfaction and engagement annually via administrative surveys.
- **Organizational Health:** Particularly in light of the school's 5-year expansion plans, Urban Academy will track organizational health metrics (finances, funds raised, audit, enrollment, etc.) to support its growth and sustainability.

Risk Mitigation

Urban Academy of Greater Pittsburgh Charter School is a high-profile organization operating in a challenging landscape – it faces obstacles, risks and threats to its academic performance, financial health, and organizational stability. Executing on the preceding plan and ensuring a successful expansion process are contingent upon strategically mitigating the following risks:

Decline in Academic Performance

Due to any number of factors (both internal and external), Urban Academy could see a decline in academic performance, threatening its ability to raise money, secure charter renewal, attract teachers, and enroll students. Charter Choices recommends the following strategies for risk mitigation, much of which is addressed in the preceding strategic plan:

- o Strategy #1 – Benchmark academic performance regularly (through interim assessments, practice standardized assessments, and other diagnostics) to minimize “surprises” when summative assessments are administered.
- o Strategy #2 – Commit to a high-quality curricular model (particularly in Math and ELA, as well as Science), and engage in periodic formal review of resources to ensure that curriculum maps address all PA Common Core State Standards and that teachers are implementing the Scope and Sequence with fidelity.

Persistent Teacher Turnover

Developing and retaining top teaching talent is rife with opportunity and risk. The current human capital environment in Pittsburgh, a strong higher education presence, combined with general uncertainty and adverse working conditions that characterize the Pittsburgh Public School system, ensures that a reliable pool of early career educators will be seeking employment for many years to come. Despite the opportunity this presents, employers such as Urban Academy will need to ensure that compensation remains competitive, employee satisfaction is prioritized, leadership remains stable, and new hires are mission-aligned. Charter Choices has outlined a number of specific action steps (see pages 20-21), and recommends that the board closely monitor turnover and satisfaction, adopting the following risk mitigation strategies:

- o Strategy #1 - Effectively recruit new staff by identifying partner organizations (IHEs, TFA, etc.), developing a specific set of criteria for candidates, conducting “Stay Interviews” with all employees each Winter and posting aggressively (Feb-Mar) for Fall openings.
- o Strategy #2 - Update the performance review process for all teachers to better understand teachers’ desired career path and tailor retention strategies accordingly (recognition, promotion, leadership opportunities, financial incentives).

Political Instability

As charter schools across the state continue to feel the effects of reduced Basic Education Funding since 2009, and with the lingering threat of a reduction in Special Education reimbursement rates, Urban Academy will need to maintain a conservative set of budgetary assumptions, and work to cultivate a strong relationship with both the local authorizer (PPS) and advocates in Harrisburg. Recommended strategies for risk mitigation include:

- o Strategy #1 - Participate in collective efforts by partners such as the PA Coalition of Charter Schools to fend off unfavorable legislation that would reduce reimbursement rates or otherwise restrict charter schools' ability to use funds. It will become increasingly important to "speak with one voice" by coordinating with neighboring charters to shape a single narrative and engage in an aggressive media campaign.
- o Strategy #2 - Over the next 5 years, build an operating reserve (through conservative budgeting and strategic fundraising and stewardship planning) that effectively buffers the school from unforeseen cutbacks at the state or local level and ensures an appropriate level of liquidity and margin.

Call to Action



Our vision for Urban Academy in 2023 is built upon an unwavering belief in the power and possibility of black children.

We're committed to the notion that all children, regardless of circumstance, can and will succeed given the proper support. Achieving our shared dream of a world-class, STREAM-infused, community-focused, 21st-century hub of learning and innovation will require nothing short of our very best – from ALL of us.

“At Urban Academy, every student matters, every family matters.”

At Urban Academy, every student matters, every family matters. We are our brother's keeper. We are our sister's keeper. We are Urban.

K. CHASE PATTERSON

CEO of Urban Academy