

**CHARLESTON
ACHIEVING
EXCELLENCE**

Executive Summary

2008-2011

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CHARLESTON ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE DISTRICT STRATEGIC OVERVIEW 2008-2011

INTRODUCTION

In 2007-2008, Charleston County School District (CCSD) took major strides. Parents were provided with more school choices than ever; world-class school facilities, computer labs and high-tech classrooms were built; innovative literacy, child health, and fine arts partnerships were launched; and high-quality teachers and principals applied data-driven decision-making, a coherent curriculum, and a belief that *all* children can achieve to turn “Excellence is our Standard” into a living, breathing philosophy.

Everywhere you turned, it was clear that the district had gone from *planning* for excellence to making it the norm. In response to our high expectations, students excelled. They earned over \$42,000,000 in scholarships (\$6,000,000 more than the previous year); did better on high school assessments for a third straight year; earned their highest ACT scores in eleven years, exceeding the state average for the first time in five years; and boosted their achievement in elementary and middle school according to the PACT (South Carolina’s annual assessment). They were also expelled, suspended, and referred to the office fewer times than in the previous year.

DISTRICT GOALS

Despite these accomplishments, the 21st Century economy demands that we do even better. We must take the foundation built by the *Charleston Plan for Excellence* to a new level, to a three-year vision of **Charleston Achieving Excellence** (“CAE”) built on simple but far-reaching goals and values that every single staff, student, parent, business and community member can relate to and benefit from. **The CAE plan will:**

- 1. Elevate the achievement of all students.** District-wide, we are going to raise the academic proficiency of our students and improve the performance of our schools.
- 2. Close the achievement gap.** In the early, middle and high school grades, we are going to decrease the achievement gaps— defined by a range of test scores and other measures— that exist between African-American, Hispanic and Caucasian students.

- 3. Increase the graduation rate.** Graduation rates overall and by subgroup will rise steadily each year, and after year three, will exceed state and national averages. We will instill a college-bound culture in every school, built on high expectations for every child and a steady connection between classroom learning and future success.

CORE VALUES

Goals cannot be achieved without a solid foundation of values that support them. That is why the CAE plan is built on three core values— **Results, Access, and Partnerships**—that form the bedrock of our work.

RESULTS: Rigor and Relevance

As a district, we focus on **results**—now clearly defined as elevating performance overall, closing the achievement gap between groups, and raising graduation rates—by increasing the **rigor** of instruction and challenging *all* students to achieve at high levels. We also make the learning process **relevant** to today's students and families. In a high-tech world that emphasizes knowledge, problem-solving and critical thinking, course offerings and instruction must connect with the goal of preparing for success in college and the 21st Century workforce.

Educators know from experience what scholarly research has now proven, which is that instructional effectiveness is at the heart of all school-based learning. This effectiveness, at its core, relies on three things working mutually:

- The quality/skill of the **teacher**,
- The rigor/level of the **content** being taught, and
- The level of **active student learning** of the content being taught.

This is why rigor and relevance are so important to our theory of action, which directly ties instructional effectiveness to the achievement of our three core goals.

ACCESS: Equity and Choice

Without **access**, a vision of *every* child learning to high standards and achieving their dreams cannot be realized. The second core value of the CAE plan is **access** through **equity** and **choice**. All students are provided with opportunities to receive effective instruction, enrichment, and advanced courses. By creating a portfolio of school options, families are given what they all want— the **choice**—to select the best possible educational setting for their children. At the high school level, we continue to support and expand 21st Century career pathways that make learning exciting, relevant, and motivational. And more of our schools must act as “Community Learning Centers,” providing access to before- and after-school learning opportunities for students, families and community members.

PARTNERSHIPS: Respect and Relationships

Public education is built on partnerships, especially in Charleston County, which is why the CAE plan strengthens CCSD's connections with volunteers, parents, communities of faith, public agencies, the business community, elected officials, and institutions of higher learning. Each partnership is built on a foundation of **respect**, and maximizes the value of **relationships** between people—student to teacher, staff to parent, and so on. The culture promoted by the CAE plan, and the district at-large, will be one that respects all people, values and promotes diversity, and encourages collaboration and feedback from all stakeholders.