



ANNA JULIA COOPER SCHOOL

ANNUAL REPORT

2023 - 2024

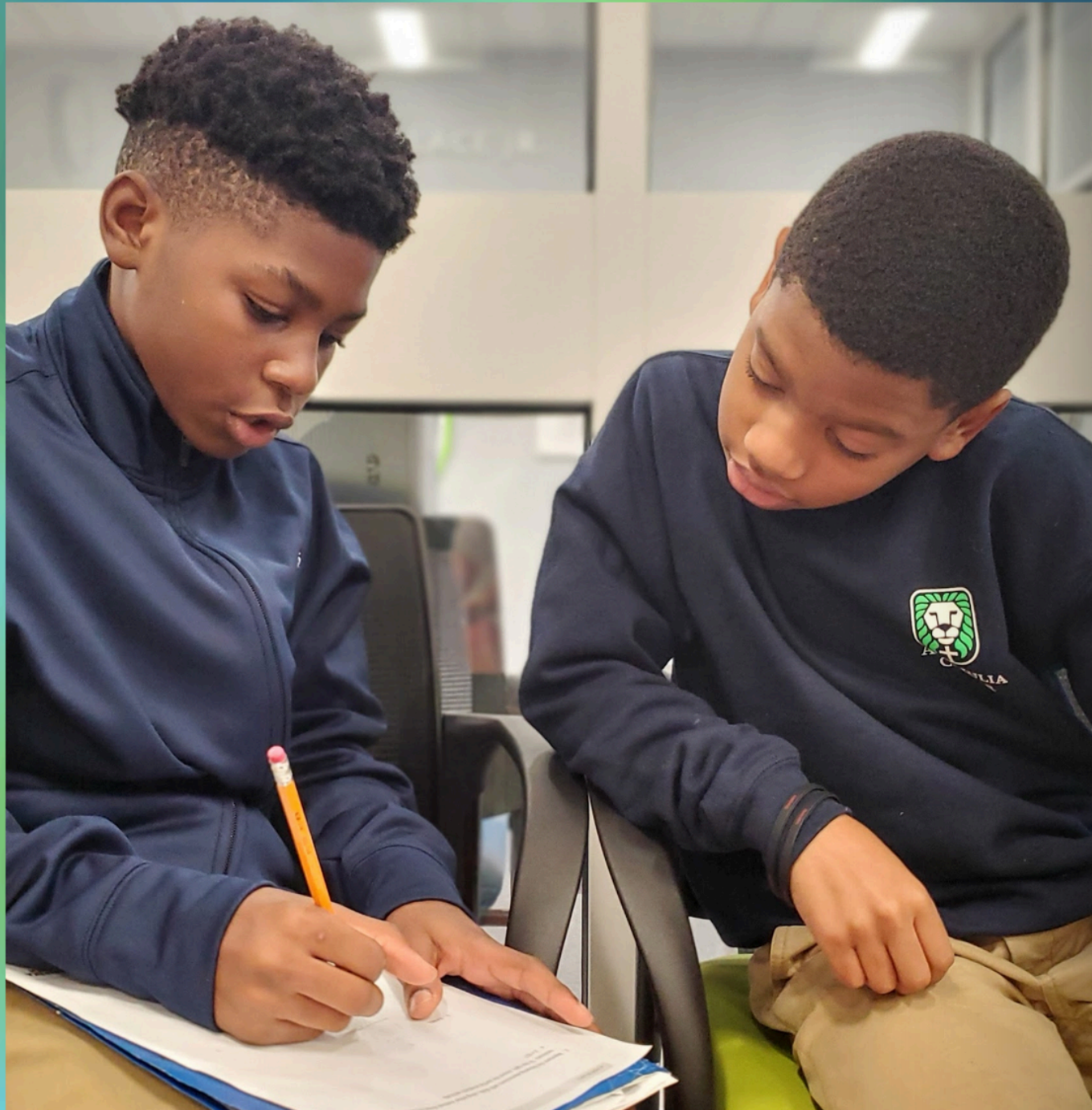


TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE	1	OPENING MESSAGE
PAGE	4	AT A GLANCE
PAGE	5	SUMMER PROGRAMS
PAGE	7	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
PAGE	9	PERMISSIONLESS LEARNING
PAGE	11	VOLUNTEERS
PAGE	14	FINANCIALS
PAGE	15	WHO WAS ANNA JULIA COOPER?
PAGE	16	15 YEARS OF AJC
PAGE	19	STAFF & BOARD

A MESSAGE FROM OUR HEAD OF SCHOOL

Dear Friends of AJC,

The 2023-24 school year was another 'best year ever' at AJC. There isn't enough space to capture all of the highlights, however I would like to share one perspective on the year as a whole.

In April we applied for a grant that posed an intriguing question: How does AJC embody "permissionless learning?" It was a great question. The Grantor was looking to support schools that had the freedom to make decisions and innovate without having to get multi-level approvals and jump through unhelpful hoops.

At AJC, we have the freedom to shape learning in ways that work best for our students. If we decide to spend an entire day reading, we can — and we do (Read Hard Play Hard). If our 1st graders want to dedicate hours in the woods building forts, playing independently, and diving into a nature-based curriculum, they can — and they do. If we want to do four hours of standardized testing at the beginning and end of the school year instead of one or two weeks of testing, we can — and we do. And we can use that 'saved' time for more direct and fruitful instruction.

If we want 20 of our graduates to work (and get paid!) during our mandatory summer session, we can do it. If we want to have an open door policy and flood the building with able and caring volunteers to help us love, educate and uplift our students, we can do it. If we want to send students to summer camps, whether for three days or three weeks, we can — and we do. If we want to stay connected with as many of our graduates as possible, offering support, celebrating their successes, or grieving alongside them, we can do that too. If we want to have a four-week summer session for all our students because we believe it's good for them and, hey, they love being here, we can make it happen. No permission required.

And almost without exception, our supporters trust us with that same permissionless freedom to do what works. They see what we are doing and they — you — then make possible the permissionless learning we practice daily. It's hard to overstate how great such support is. Moreover, it inspires us to dig deep and strive to fulfill our mission with that permissionless energy and passion because your trust moves us to. On behalf of all the staff, students, graduates and volunteers at AJC, thank you for making that possible.

Sincerely,

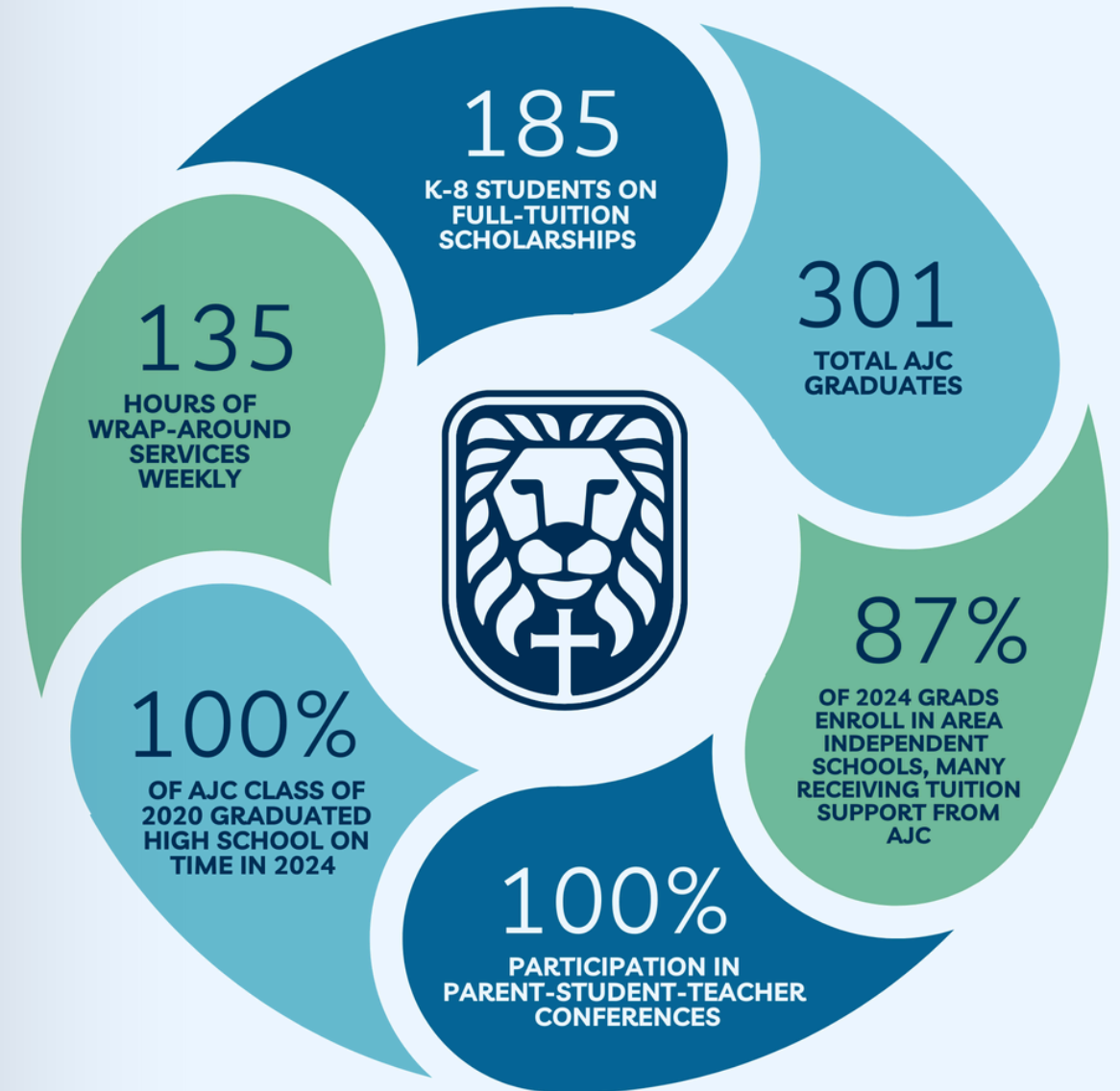


Michael Maruca
Head of School





AJC AT A GLANCE



SUMMER PROGRAMS

Come July, our halls were buzzing with the energy of our 4-week summer program—a must for all students, both new and returning. Students get a taste of the academics and activities to come in the upcoming school year, while also enjoying field trips and experiences unique to our summer program.

Each day kicks off with morning academics — think English and Math power sessions — then we share a nutritious lunch, followed by reading groups and some hands-on activities. Afternoons are all about trying new things — whether it's swimming, hiking,

biking, or a taste of local culture, our kids get to dive into all sorts of enriching experiences.

We love staying connected with our grads, and one way we do that is by inviting them back for our Summer Work Program. This year, 20 of our high school grads came back to earn a paycheck and gain real-world experience in various aspects of school life — from classroom support to administrative tasks and custodial work. It's always a treat to have our graduates back in the buildings, and it's particularly heartwarming to see them engage with our current students. It's a win-win.



Many of our students eagerly joined Culture Encounters' "Eat. Talk. Write." program, where they explored new cuisines, connected with local restauranteurs with inspiring stories, and expressed their own experiences through writing. Meanwhile, our sixth-grade girls embraced the rhythm and beauty of Bharatanatyam, a classical Indian art form, by participating in weekly classes that blended music, dance, and storytelling.

For our most adventurous students, connecting with nature through sleepaway camps has become a cherished part of the AJC summer experience. This year, we sent over 30 students to camp, giving them the chance to unplug from their devices and rediscover themselves while building stronger connections with one another.

Our summer session lays the groundwork for a successful year of learning and growth. When students return in August, they hit the ground running.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our school building serves as more than just a place for our students; it's a vibrant hub for community engagement. Each initiative fosters stronger community connections and involvement between our students and neighbors.

On weekends, our gym becomes a welcoming space for local teens, providing a safe, supervised environment for shooting some hoops and hanging out. On any given Friday or Saturday, you can find anywhere from 30-50 people enjoying a pickup game of basketball and some pizza. The program has quickly become a community favorite.

The Gordon Wallace Day of Giving is a beloved tradition where our students roll up their sleeves and give back to the community. This year, they planted flowers for our neighbors and made an art project for residents in memory care at



Westminster Canterbury. Gordon Wallace, our founding board chair, served AJC with great devotion until his passing in 2021, and this day honors his inspiring legacy.

The Middle School cafeteria is available to our neighbors as a bright event space for socializing and celebrations. We have been delighted to see it in use for birthday parties and baby showers many weekends throughout the year.

Every year, we throw our Spring Bash, and it's always a blast! There's awesome food, fun activities, bounce houses, and even a dunk tank. The highlight? Watching the students line up to dunk Mr. Maruca—it's their absolute favorite part! It's a great chance for us to connect and have fun with our neighbors.

We're also proud to be a polling place, giving our community an easy, local spot to cast their votes. It means a lot to us to be a space where civic engagement is encouraged and celebrated.

PERMISSIONLESS LEARNING

What does permissionless learning mean? It means if a teacher dreams up a curriculum that's mostly outdoors, packed with adventure, exploration, and even tree climbing, we go for it. If we decide a "Read Hard, Play Hard" day is exactly what our students need for meaningful learning, we make it happen—no hoops to jump through.

Every K-5 student learns to swim. Why? Because they love it, and it's an essential life skill. We stayed open through the pandemic, even while other schools closed their doors for over a year. It was hard work, but our kids needed us.

Our four-week summer session? It's required because we know it's valuable for our students. And when students walk through our doors, they turn in their phones—because we know that too much screen time isn't healthy for them. We don't need permission to do what's best for our kids.

We also make sure parents are part of their child's education by requiring them to come to parent-teacher-student conferences. And if they need a ride, we'll pick them up. Same goes for our students—missing the bus doesn't mean they miss the whole day.

At AJC, permissionless learning lets us say "yes"—yes to new opportunities, yes to innovative ideas, and most importantly, yes to our students and families.



VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers play a crucial role in our community of affection. They bring a sense of stability, support, and encouragement to our students. By offering their time and attention, they help students navigate academic challenges and personal issues.

The **Mystery Lunch Buddy Program** is a huge hit with both volunteers and students. Sharing a meal with a caring adult makes children feel valued and heard, fostering a positive and nurturing environment. Volunteers are matched with students and often remain paired for years, creating lasting relationships. Lunch buddies commit to visiting once a month, but the mystery lies in “when,” adding excitement. These casual interactions build meaningful bonds over time.

“Volunteers are an important addition to our school because they form personal relationships with our students. The more you get to know these special kids, the more you believe in the mission of our school to love, educate, and uplift them.”

**- Emily Fritz,
2nd Grade Teacher**



Volunteer roles like **classroom aides, study hall helpers, and reading buddies** provide a consistent presence on the academic front. When a student has a better understanding of the material, classroom behavior and engagement often improves. One-on-one attention and the ability to ask questions in a small setting can make a world of difference. 7th grader, Imani, says “My volunteer never rushes me. He lets me try the problem my own way and then helps me if I need it. He is always kind and helps me a lot.”

Our volunteers often share that through their experiences at AJC, they receive as much as they give. They love hearing about the students’ lives and learning about their interests. This dynamic creates a mutually beneficial relationship, enriching the lives of both volunteers and the students.

“We may work on reading or math, but it’s really all about loving the kids.”

- Pam Sweeney, Volunteer





FINANCIALS

July 1st, 2023 - June 30th, 2024

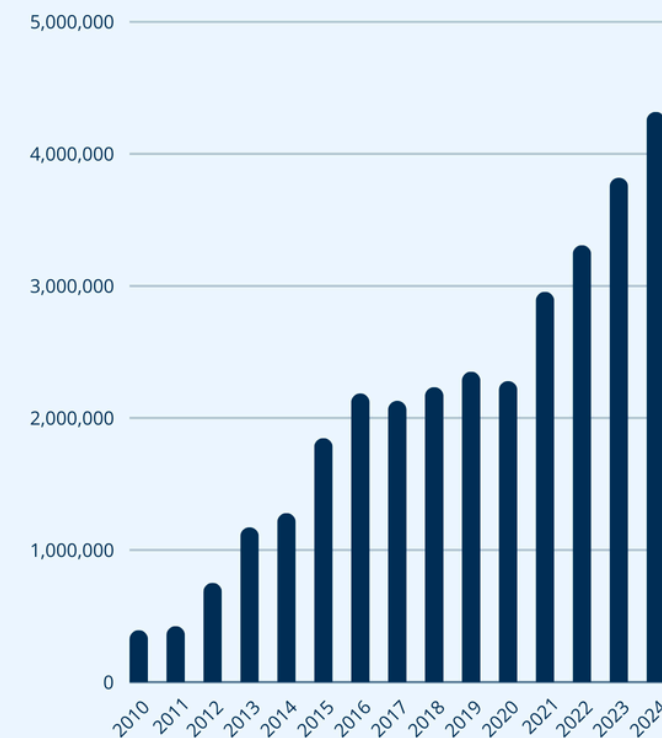
Revenue*

DONOR TYPE	AMOUNT
Individuals	\$2,060,579
Foundations	\$989,896
Corporations	\$114,697
Churches/Civic Support	\$142,608
Miscellaneous	\$219,016
Other **	\$792,050
TOTAL	\$4,318,846

Expenses*

CATEGORY	AMOUNT
Program	\$3,224,015
Graduate Support	\$266,062
Management & General	\$507,530
Fundraising	\$321,239
TOTAL	\$4,318,846

Revenue Growth



* These figures do not include capital expenses, capital campaign pledges or contributions, donated goods/services, or existing restricted endowment funds, all of which are included in our audit and may be found on our website, ajcschool.org.

** Includes \$792,050 from operational reserves, which offset annual expense increases due to the expansion.

LIFE AND LEGACY OF ANNA JULIA COOPER

Born into slavery in 1858, Anna Julia Cooper dedicated her life to the fight for race and gender equality with unwavering determination. She lived a remarkable 105 years, from the last days of slavery to the heart of the Civil Rights movement. A brilliant educator, author, and prominent member of Washington D.C.'s African American community, she became the 4th African American woman to earn a doctoral degree when she received her PhD from the University of Paris-Sorbonne.



This year, her relentless pursuit of educational equality took center stage in *Tempestuous Elements*, an Arena Stage Power Play production that ran for several weeks in Washington, D.C. The play, which received rave reviews from critics, local news, and our own teachers and staff, shone a long-overdue spotlight on her remarkable life and legacy.

While Cooper's academic and civil achievements were groundbreaking, she once said her most significant accomplishment was "the building of a beautiful home at the Capital from my own earnings to be dedicated in the name of my slave mother to the education of colored working people." Her beloved home, where she lived for 40 years in the historic LeDroit Park neighborhood of D.C., is now honored as part of the African American Heritage Trail.

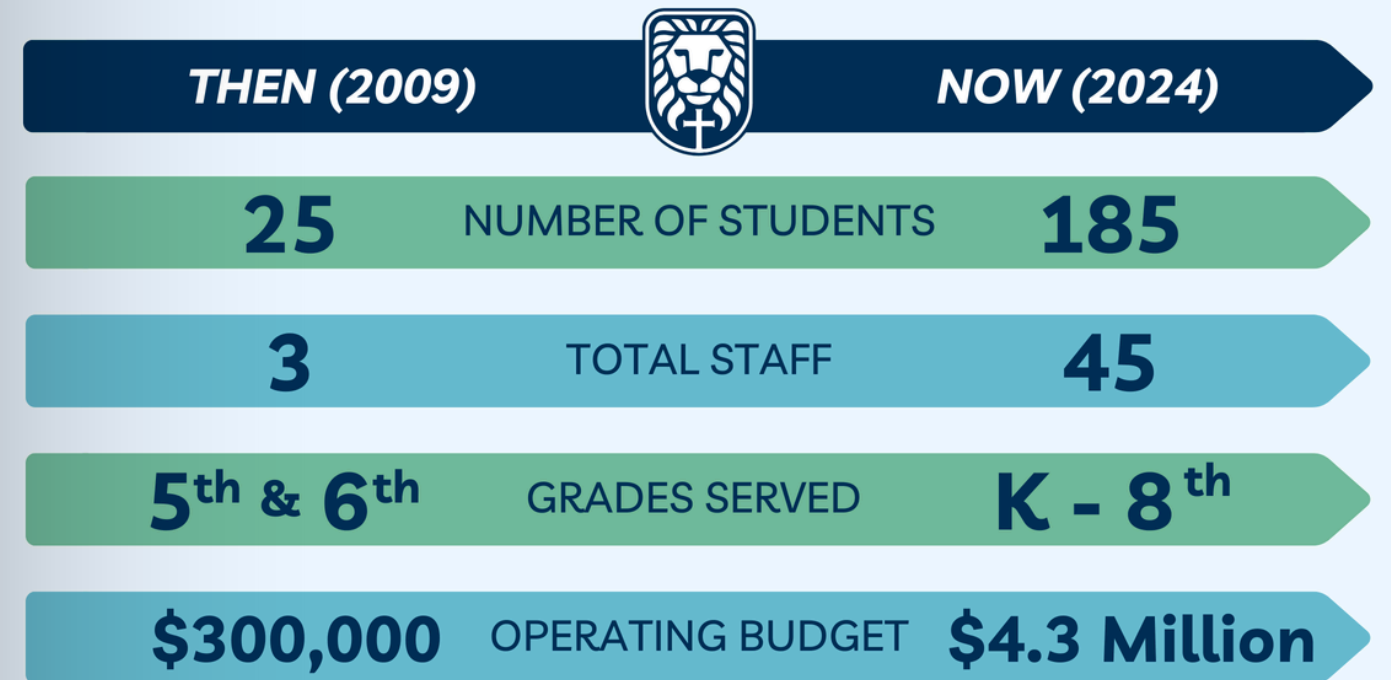


In tribute to our remarkable namesake, each year before graduation, Mr. Maruca and Principal Gilliam take our 8th grade students on a day trip to visit the Anna Julia Haywood Cooper Residence at 201 T Street. This pilgrimage allows our students to connect with her powerful legacy and to draw inspiration from her indelible impact on education and equality.

15 YEARS OF AJC

2009 - 2024

In our first 15 years, Anna Julia Cooper School has grown from a small, dedicated initiative into a thriving community and beacon of opportunity in Richmond's East End. This growth reflects our commitment to holistic education, with the addition of support services and enrichment programs that nurture students' academic, personal, and life skills—preparing them for success in high school and beyond. We remain steadfast in our mission to provide a tuition-free, high-quality education to students from limited financial resources, bridging opportunity gaps and supporting each child's academic, social, and personal growth. We look forward to loving, educating, and uplifting students for generations to come.



AJC THROUGH THE YEARS...



Anna Julia Cooper School opened with 25 students in a house on N. 22nd St.



Added a Graduate Support Program



Launched a \$16 million campaign for a new middle school/ gymnasium, multi-year operating support, and to start an endowment



Opened for summer school in July despite the significant challenges of Covid; Remained open for the 2020-2021 school year; Broke ground for a new middle school building and gymnasium



Expanded into K & 1st Grades to become a full K-8 school



Reached a milestone of 300 graduates

2009

2014

2019

2020

2022

2024

2011

2016

2021

2023

Enrollment grew to 51 students in grades 6-8; Moved to a former daycare building on N. 29th Street, current site of Lower School



Added 4th grade; School became accredited



Moved into new Middle School building; added 2nd and 3rd grades



Significantly expanded family engagement activities and wrap around support services



2023-2024 STAFF & BOARD



Leadership


MIKE MARUCA, Head of School
 YOLANDA GILLIAM, Principal
 MICHEAL CRANE, Lower School Principal
 LADESHA BATTEN, Director of Mental Health Services
 SUSAN BARSTOW, Director of Curriculum and Instruction
 LORIN JOHNSON, Director of Graduate Support
 LAURA MCGOWAN, Director of Development and Communications
 TANISHA MOYER, Lower School Administrator
 KATYE SNIPES, School Administrator
 LINTON WADE, Dean of Students and Athletics Director

Board of Directors

GUSSIE BANNARD, former Head, St. Catherine's School
 LAUREN BROWN, former Elementary Teacher, Collegiate School
 RAE COUSINS, Counsel, Brown-Greer, LLP
 MARY DESCH, former Director of Graduate Support, Anna Julia
 Cooper School
 BETSY FAUNTLEROY, **AJC Board Secretary**, Community Volunteer
 SYDNEY GOTTWALD, Community Volunteer
 SHELTON HORSLEY, Senior Client Portfolio Manager, Thompson,
 Siegel & Walmsley LLC
 JILL HUNTER, **AJC Board Chair**, former Head of Lower School,
 Collegiate School
 CHARLES KLEINDIENST, President, Nerds to Go
 MARK O'NEIL, Director, Carmax
 MALCOLM RANDOLPH, Senior Vice President, Colliers
 JULIE RAUTIO, Founding Partner, Capital Results
 WILLIAM "MO" SHUMATE, former President, M & R Constructors
 MEG WALKER, Community Volunteer
 MIKE WALKER, Consultant
 ELIZABETH WALLACE, Community Volunteer
 FLEET WALLACE, Managing Principal, McCann Realty Partners
 BRENT WINN, **AJC Board Treasurer**, Chief Financial Officer,
 Medalist Diversified REIT

Faculty & Staff

KATE ABBOTT, LS Social Worker
 INGRID ADDISON, Admissions
 JOE ALLRED, Middle School English
 KIARA AUSTIN, Middle School Kitchen
 KELSEY BARNES, Outpatient Therapist
 FLOYD BROWN, Maintenance Assistant
 ANTHONY BURLEY, Assistant Director Graduate Support
 BRIDGETTE CRADDOCK, Facilities Manager
 J'NIQUE CRADDOCK, Director of Food Services
 AMAYA DOSWELL, Lower School Title I Reading
 AARON EVERIC, Library & IT
 JENESSE EVERTSON, 1st Grade
 THEO FRANKEL, Lower School Classroom Aide
 EMILY FRITZ, 2nd Grade
 CHRISTY GORE, 5th Grade Language Arts
 TIM GRIMES, Kindergarten Classroom Aide
 PAULA HARPER, Bookkeeper
 ERIKA HOLMES, Violin Instructor
 MEREAL HUGHES, Middle School Science & English
 ELIZABETH JOHNSON, Middle School Academic Support
 TAMARA JOHNSON, 3rd Grade
 BRIAN KEIPER, Middle School Social Studies & History
 MICHELLE LIGHTFOOT, Music
 DANIEL MARTIN, Middle School Math
 STEVE MCNAMEE, 5th Grade
 MYRTLE MINES, Middle School Math & Science
 SHANNON MOISE, MS Social Worker
 KRISSI MORLEY, Grants Manager
 KATERINA MOSS, Communication Designer
 ASHLEY RAGGI, Special Projects
 KATHERINE REID, Donor Relations Coordinator
 JULISA ROBINSON, Kindergarten
 SAM TREPP, Middle School English & History
 VICTORIA WEAN, 4th Grade
 BROOKS WHITTEN, Lower School Classroom Aide

 (804) 822-6610

 info@ajcschool.org

 @AJCLions

 ajcschool.org

 2100 N 29th Street
Richmond, VA 23223



ANNA JULIA COOPER
SCHOOL

faith • knowledge • pride