



Renaissance  
Academy  
CHARTER SCHOOL

# 2020-2025 Strategic Plan

Renaissance Academy Charter School

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CHARTER  
CHOICES

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## Call to Action

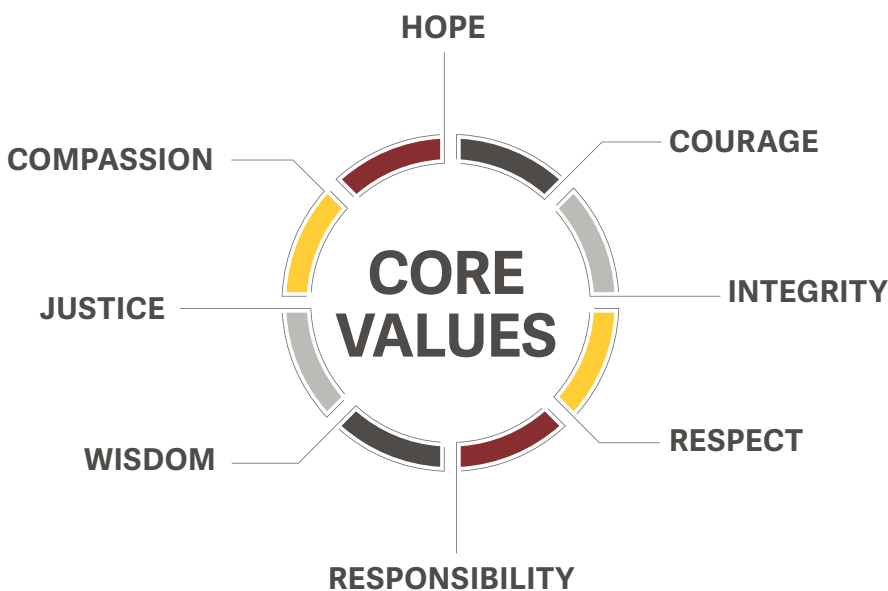
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# I. PURPOSE & BACKGROUND

## Our Identity

Since its initial chartering in 1999, Renaissance Academy Charter School ("RA") of Phoenixville has served thousands of students and families from across 22 southeastern Pennsylvania school districts. RA stands proudly on its legacy of academic excellence, intellectual rigor, STEM and arts integration, and provides a model of innovation and student-centered instruction. Enrolling some 1,060 students from grades K-12, RA is #33 out of 668 Pennsylvania public high schools (and the #1-ranked charter school in the Commonwealth), and is among the top 5% of all high schools in the county according to US News and World Report. The school's stellar track record (discussed in detail on page 7 of this document) is matched only by its commitment to educating the whole child, evidenced by its extensive extracurricular offerings in athletics, culture and the arts, and by its

### Core Values:



Now celebrating its 20th year (with a 5K Run and Grand Gala, among other festivities!), RA continues to innovate and achieve both schoolwide and individual recognition. Highlights from the current (2019-20) school year include:

- Hosted Legislative Breakfast for federal and state politicians in January 2020
- Ranked #4 out of 184 Philadelphia-area high schools on Keystone Exams
- Held Financial Reality Fair in November 2019 to teach students financial literacy, budgeting, investment, etc.
- Widener University offered instant admission to RA Seniors in October 2019
- Individual and group achievements in spelling bee, district chorus, basketball, volleyball, state band, ice skating, baseball, entrepreneurship, radio broadcasting, and girl scouting

“  
RA feels like a family. We are small, safe, and close-knit, and truly value 1-on-1 relationships.”  
–Parent and Board Member

With an extensive waiting list, a talented instructional team, steady leadership at both the management and governance levels, and a healthy financial outlook, RA is now uniquely positioned to strategically consider its future and ensure both its continued competitive advantage (via programmatic innovation) and its ability to serve an even greater number of students in Phoenixville and beyond. The strategic planning process discussed in greater detail on the ensuing pages represents the culmination of 6 months of focused, sustained data-gathering and sense-making among the Strategic Planning Committee (see names of participants on page 23) in partnership with both Charter Choices (strategy advising) and NorthStar Owners Representatives (project management services). This process has also taken place concurrently with the school's state-mandated Comprehensive Planning Process for the next three years (2020-23). The highlights of the Comprehensive Plan – to be finalized in Spring 2020 - include:

- Achieving charter renewal in 2020 (RA's fourth renewal from Phoenixville Area SD)
  - Maintaining an S&P Bond Rating of BB- or higher (particularly important given the school's near-future expansion plans)
  - Build upon and strengthen teacher development and retention systems via Teaching & Learning (T&L) Coaching, Master Teacher Program and House-based Induction Model
  - Maximize the FLEX Period for high school students to attract and retain those looking for career and workplace learning options and STEAM-based enrichment
  - Develop a pipeline of Middle Grades (6-8) instructional leaders and engage in long-range succession planning for key senior leadership roles
  - Create robust differentiated programming for students of advanced abilities and interests at all grade levels in need of intellectual challenge
  - Ensure that all staff demonstrate proficiency in culturally-responsive, anti-bias instruction and classroom practices
  - Develop and execute a plan for full (1:1) technology integration and literacy, bolstered by an investment in the Google Classroom Suite for educators and staff
  - Systemic improvement of the school's Special Education program (co-teaching allocations, communication/ planning between teachers-tutors-leaders)

These priorities are reflected in the strategy narrative, objectives and action plans that follow, and have also given shape to the physical space design being led by NorthStar.

**The Mission of the Renaissance Academy is to prepare a diverse cross-section of children for success as students, workers, and citizens by providing them with a high-quality, liberal arts, college preparatory education through creation of a school in which high standards, creativity, technological sophistication, high motivation, and accountability are the norm. The school aims to achieve lasting gains in students' academic performance while serving the diverse needs of all students."**

*–RACS Website*



## Our Process

The Renaissance Academy ("RA") Board of Trustees – in partnership with its senior leadership and its Strategic Advisor, Charter Choices, Inc., initiated a six-month strategic planning process that included the following phases:

- **Phase 1 – Convene & Develop Approach**
  - Needs Assessment with K-12 Leadership (Summer 2019)
  - Planning Retreat with Strategic Planning Committee (Fall 2019)
- **Phase 2 – Gather & Interpret Stakeholder Input**
  - Focus Groups: Teachers/Staff, Leadership, Families, Students (Winter 2020)
- **Phase 3 – Compose & Strategize Strategic Vision**
  - Establish Priority Areas, Goals & Benchmarks (Winter 2020)
  - Develop Written Plan & Measurement Tools (Spring 2020)

Now in its "public phase", the RA 2025 Plan will be communicated to its key stakeholder groups and regularly measured for impact according to the following timeline:

- **Phase 4 – Launch & Engage**
  - Staff & Board Presentations (Spring 2020)
  - Community Town Hall Events by Region (Spring 2020)
- **Phase 5 – Sustain and Evaluate Progress**
  - Utilize Implementation Tracker (Summer 2020)
  - Semi-Annual Retreats with Senior Leadership (Fall 2020 – Fall 2021)

Through a combination of SWOT Analysis (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats), workshop meetings, focus groups and feedback sessions (outlined in Phases 1 & 2 above), the RA Planning Committee reviewed over 1,000 reflections, suggestions and ideas from respondents, and ultimately identified four (4) key Organizational Dimensions of the school's "Current Reality" (page 6 of this document) to be addressed:

- **Programs** – what makes our offerings unique and innovative
- **Performance** – how we perform, relative to our peers and ourselves over time
- **Resources** – the assets that fuel our work (human, capital, digital and otherwise)
- **Community** – the relationships (both internal and external) that energize our work

While some variation emerged among the school's various groups, a handful of important questions surfaced in some form or fashion. These questions animated the conversations we convened and the survey comments we received, and served as way-markers that pointed the Committee toward the "big picture" issues that would ultimately drive our strategy:

### Program-Related Considerations:

- How do we ensure that RA is a safe, warm and inclusive space for ALL of our families and students?
- How do we strengthen and promote RA's brand externally to drive enrollment growth and mitigate the impact of an unfavorable public narrative around school choice?
- What moves will we make to ensure that all of our students are successful academically, from those in need of intervention to those who desire an increased level of challenge?
- How will RA prepare its students for the 21st Century marketplace of ideas through a broader range of STEAM-integrated, career and workplace-based learning experiences?

**Facilities-Related Considerations:**

- Which facilities scenario/option under current consideration (March 2020) is best-suited to RA's emerging strategic vision around the following three areas:
  - STEAM/College-and-Career Pathways, PBL, etc.
  - Fostering joy, school spirit and a unified K-12 culture
  - Supporting the needs of diverse learners, particularly those with severe academic, social and emotional needs
- Which enrollment target (current – 1200~, 1600, 2000) must the school achieve, and by what year, in order to afford the necessary capital improvements and program enhancements (outlined in this document)?
- What related incremental costs will the school incur in terms of staffing, site costs, technology, curriculum, supplies, etc.

After considering the implications of these questions (what strategies have been attempted in the past, what has worked versus what has not), along with both the strengths and growth areas of each of the four (4) Organization Dimensions (discussed in greater detail on pages 6-9), the Committee distilled its emerging strategic vision down to four (4) Priority Areas:

## Renaissance Academy Strategic Priority Areas (4Cs)

**CULTURE**

**COMMUNICATION**

**CHALLENGE**

**CUSTOMIZATION**

These Priority Areas and their associated goals, strategic actions and benchmarks over the next five (5) years (2020-25) form the backbone of the school's vision for the near and long term, and are further detailed on page 10 of this plan.

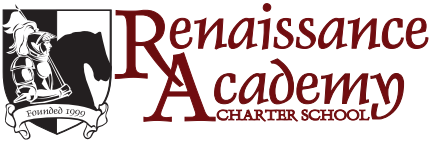
In the spirit of two of its Core Values – Courage and Responsibility - the RA Strategic Planning Committee has also worked with Charter Choices to develop the following tools to ensure its work remains aligned with its strategic vision, and to provide its staff and board with the resources to reflect and recalibrate its efforts as internal and external conditions inevitably change over the next five (5) years:

- 5-Year Budget Projection
- Strategic Plan Implementation Tracker
- Strategic Plan Metrics & Measures Dashboard

Finally, the Committee has identified and prepared comments (see page 20) on those external conditions (regulatory, fiscal, political, demographic, educational) that might present both opportunities and threats to RA's health and viability over time. In each case, the committee has offered recommendations for future consideration and ongoing discussion.



**O**n behalf of the Strategic Planning Committee of Renaissance Academy Charter School, we invite you to first read through the pages that follow, considering the unique assets and the particular challenges that characterize this school community. We hope that you will draw both inspiration and challenge from RA's emerging strategic vision. If anything has become clear to this committed group of volunteers in our six months of learning and preparation, it is this: RA is only as strong as the collective passion and investment of its teachers, families, students, leaders and board members. The future success of our school depends on our shared commitment, each and every day, to the words of our Mission: "high standards, creativity, technological sophistication, high motivation, and accountability" must be "the norm". So, we thank you for stepping into this work with us, and for accepting the challenge to ensure that RA remains the gold standard for public education in our state for years to come!



## II. CURRENT REALITY

### Our Programs

#### What are Our Strengths?

When it comes to Renaissance Academy's instructional program, the school's "competitive advantage" lies in our commitment to offering rigorous course options to all of our students and in the systems of support we afford our most vulnerable learners:

#### • **Rigorous Course Offerings**

- According to 2018 data, 110 students completed 191 AP exams, and over 60% earned a score of 3 or higher. RA's average AP scores outpace the national average, despite encouraging universal participation among our high school students.
- RA exceeds the state average (61.5% vs. 57.5%) in the percentage of our students participating in a rigorous course of study (AP/IB, College Dual Enrollment, CTE). Our commitment to college readiness makes us unique among charter schools and has earned us Middle States Accreditation since 2014.

#### • **Systems of Academic Support**

- RA offers Academic Intervention Club to students in need of homework support, as well as a FLEX Period for high school students (who can select from tutoring, extended learning, clubs, electives, or study hall).
- RA intentionally cultivates our values of "Justice" and "Compassion" in each student, engaging them in community volunteerism via partnerships with Communities that Care, Phoenixville Area Non-Profit Roundtable, Activate Phoenixville, Future Leaders of Today, QVC Mentoring, etc.

#### What are Our Growth Areas?

As we expand our programmatic vision for the future, we will continue to highlight the following areas for growth and improvement (these form the basis for our strategic goals):

#### • **Industry-Based Learning**

- According to Pennsylvania's Future Ready Index (FRI), only 1.5% of RA students are participating in industry-based learning (as measured by an industry-based exam, an industry-recognized credential, or by completing workplace learning).

**“What makes us truly unique is our emphasis on the fine arts and on Spanish instruction, starting in Kindergarten. Our wait list speaks for itself – families want what RA has to offer!”**

*–Lower School Teacher*



## Our Performance

### What are Our Strengths?

RA's students come from a variety of circumstances; some arrive with significant academic and social challenges. We have little control over what our students know and can (or cannot) do when they arrive, but can say with pride and confidence that our students are genuinely prepared for college and that they consistently outperform their peer schools.

#### • **College and Career Access**

- RA students successfully transition at a high rate (84.7%) to post-secondary work, military or study. According to FRI data for 2018, 100% of RA's 5-year cohort achieved graduation. The school's most recent graduating class (2019) also earned over \$11M in college scholarships.
- RA also achieved an exceptionally high score on the FRI's Career Standards Benchmark (with 99.2% of our students "demonstrating meaningful engagement in career exploration and preparation aligned to the Career Education and Work (CEW) standards"). RACS has already exceeded the 2030 statewide goal (98.6% vs. 92.4%)

#### • **Schoolwide Performance on Traditional Metrics**

- All student groups at RA met proficiency targets in ELA, Math and Science on the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA), and all groups met their growth targets in Science/Biology.
- RA students exceeded state averages for "Advanced" performance in all subject areas (ELA, Math, Science).

### What are Our Growth Areas?

Despite our strong track record of schoolwide academic excellence, we are committed to ensuring that all student subgroups achieve equitable outcomes. Based on our most recent PSSA/Keystone results, there is work yet to be done.

#### • **Subgroup & Growth Metrics**

- RA students did not meet the schoolwide growth standard (69.8 vs. 75.0 in ELA; 65.5 vs. 75.3 in Math), and must target interventions in support of vulnerable subgroups.
- The school's Economically Disadvantaged (ED) students (representing 21.6% of total enrollment) declined in ELA, and (along with our African American subgroup) lagged behind RA's White students in Math/Algebra (59 versus 67.3% proficient)

**“We want to ensure that ‘all’ really means ALL when it comes to both academic achievement and cultural inclusivity.”**

*–Administrator*

## Our Resources

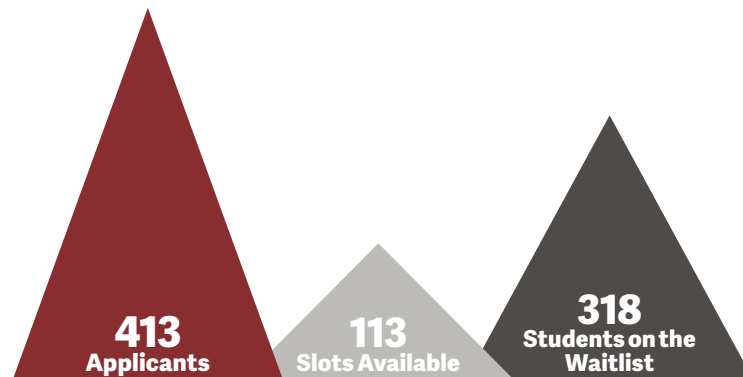
### What are Our Strengths?

Organizationally, RA is rich in resources, primarily in the areas of human capital and overall fiscal health (both of which are supremely important as the school moves toward expansion):

- **Fiscal Health**

- RA maintains a very robust Fund Balance (\$3,717,390 in 2018). Led by a strong Business Office and supplemented by a Development Office to support our capital planning efforts, the school has a long track record of clean audits and of a strong bond rating (BB-) with S&P. RA also enjoys consistently high demand among families and must hold an annual lottery for the few available seats. Here are the results of its most recent lottery, held in advance of the 2020-21 school year:

### 2020-2021 Renaissance Academy Lottery Results



- **Differentiated Teacher Development Programs**

- The school boasts a world-class faculty, supported initially by a PDE-approved Induction Model that is embedded within its House System. As teachers advance in their practice at RA, they are afforded opportunities to serve as Teaching & Learning (T&L) Coaches and/or as Master Teachers. These teams consist of hand-picked expert teachers who are given the freedom to engage in self-directed professional development and who coach, support and mentor novice peers.

“Our staff is the most dedicated I know. We ask a great deal of them, and provide them with a range of opportunities to exercise leadership within their teams and across the school.”—Administrator

### What are Our Growth Areas?

As RA has grown and evolved organizationally, our student body has diversified and our demographics now reflect the broad range of communities and districts that we serve. While we remain committed to diversity, equity and the success of all students, our staff composition is racially homogenous and our student services programs will likely require additional investment in order to achieve our vision for inclusion.

- **Lack of Staffing Diversity**

- RA’s enrollment includes 19.4% African American students, but just XX% of staff are also Black. A growing body of research confirms that students of color benefit greatly from having even one (1) teacher of color during their K-12 learning experience. This is a challenge that must be addressed through strategic attention to recruitment, hiring and retention practices.

- **Need for Investment in Student Services Infrastructure**

- As RA’s student composition shifts, the unique and rapidly changing needs of its newest students outpace our Special Education team’s ability to respond. This includes students with diagnosed learning, behavioral and emotional exceptionalities, as well as mainstream students in need of interventions and support in order to succeed. An investment in added resources will likely be required in the form of professional staff, contracted services, dedicated space(s) and technology.

## Our Community

### What are Our Strengths?

At the heart of our school culture lies a deep and abiding commitment to compassion and mutual regard. Each and every member of our community has value, and we believe that each has something unique and powerful to contribute in service of the greater good – both within and outside of our walls.

#### • **Community Outreach & Support Programs**

- RA cares for its most vulnerable students and families by offering holiday meals and assistance through our backpack program, food and coat drives, and a school supply closet that affords underprivileged students the resources needed to succeed on a daily basis. We also engage parents as mentors for the children in our community through our Watch Dog program (fathers) and specialized mentoring for girls.
- Our parents are particularly active through our Family School Organization (FSO) and our Board of Trustees. Various parent action committees take the lead on fundraising, event planning and sponsorship, coaching and club advising. Our students' 95.8% regular attendance rate (a full 10 percentage points above the state average) is a further indicator of our families' commitment to the school's mission.

### What are Our Growth Areas?

As with any family, we recognize our areas of dysfunction at RA, and our need to improve communication and collaboration across our school divisions. We have also prioritized our need to extend and promote the "RA Brand" to the greater Phoenixville community (and indeed across the Commonwealth).

#### • **Organizational Incoherence**

- Despite a shared commitment to the school's mission and instructional philosophy, RA's Lower and Upper Schools feel like two different entities in terms of their daily procedures, communal rituals, and organizational practices. Children and adults alike cite a desire to "bridge the divide" through schoolwide events that cultivate pride and connection between students across grade levels.

#### • **Lack of Brand Recognition**

- Awareness of RA's brand and achievements lag behind its actual results, as members of the general Phoenixville community and beyond remain relatively unclear on its mission and programs. As the school looks to expand its enrollment and outreach efforts and continue to fight the PR battle around school choice, it becomes imperative that leadership and the Board approach marketing strategically and host community-focused events that will attract and engage the public.

**It's about more than just being the best school academically – we want RA to be a place where everyone feels welcome, everyone feels joy, and students – across both Lower and Upper Schools – feel connected to one another and can celebrate our RA identity.”**

*–Upper School Student*

## III. STRATEGIC VISION

### Our Desired Future

By the Fall of 2025, Renaissance Academy Charter School (“RA”) will be defined by an organizational and cultural commitment to equity, inclusion and the active engagement of all of its members. Its brand and identity will be widely recognized among leaders, partners and prospective families across Southeastern Pennsylvania. RA’s name will be readily identified with programmatic innovation and outstanding achievement in college and career preparation. Driven by its expansion efforts in 2020-21, the school’s programs and facilities will reflect the best in research-based instructional practices, STEAM-driven career exploration and customizable learning pathways.

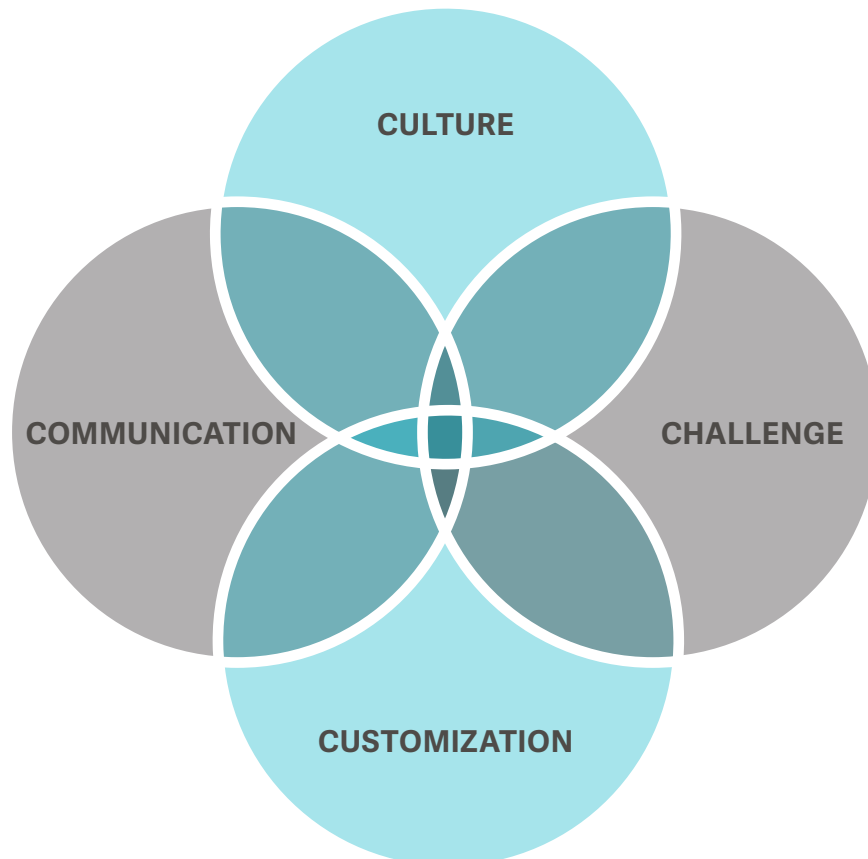
### Priorities

Achieving this desired state within five (5) years will require thoughtful and purposeful planning, strategic leadership, and a willingness to invest time and energy and to take calculated risks to reach new heights. This new strategic vision will be grounded in four (4) priority areas (4Cs):

- **CULTURE**
- **COMMUNICATION**
- **CHALLENGE**
- **CUSTOMIZATION**

The pages that follow provide a “roadmap” to success in each area, an action plan that articulates specific objectives, along with concrete action steps (short and long-term) to achieving them.

### Action Plan



## CULTURE

COMMIT TO DEEP AND MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ALL MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY – ADULTS AND CHILDREN ALIKE – ENSURING EQUITY OF ACCESS, OPPORTUNITY AND VOICE.

### GOALS:

1. RA will work intentionally to build a strong, schoolwide culture of joy and celebration.
2. RA will actively cultivate a culture of inclusion that aims to meet the needs of diverse learners

### **GOAL #1: RA will work intentionally to build a strong, schoolwide culture of joy and celebration**

#### **Short-Term**

- Task House Teams with increasing cross-division celebration and collaboration through the development of an annual calendar of schoolwide events (pep rallies, competitions, performing arts and STEM events, assemblies, etc.).
- Task House Leads with promoting such events through new (social media/print flyers/PA system/Activity Fair) and existing (texts/emails/calls to families) means of communication. Update House Lead application process and provide annual stipend for leadership.
- Expand Mentor/Buddy programs beyond existing “pilot classrooms” to be schoolwide initiative (K-12).

### **GOAL #2: RA will actively cultivate a culture of inclusion that aims to meet the needs of diverse learners.**

#### **Short-Term**

- When hiring any new Special Education staff, prioritize cross-training in one or more of the following areas: therapy, social work, behavior support, emotional disturbance, and trauma-informed practices.
- Prioritize recruitment, selection and hiring of diverse staff through membership in professional organizations, LinkedIn, targeted recruitment websites, etc.
- Prioritize recruitment of diverse parent representatives to FSO and Board through messaging, special interest parent gatherings, panel discussions, etc.

#### **Long-Term**

- Task PBIS Committee with annual review of effectiveness of current PBIS programs in providing viable alternatives to traditional discipline (detentions, suspension) through mindfulness, emotional self-regulation, incentives, peer mentoring, etc.
- Evaluate effectiveness of Camp Timber program for K-3 and allocation of additional time for 5th-6th grades. Make recommendations on expansion of socioemotional learning options for all remaining grades (K-12).
- Incorporate flexible space in any new or renovated space for decompression (children and adults) and reflection (i.e., formal space such as self-contained emotional support classroom, and informal space such as flexible shared workspaces).

## COMMUNICATION

BUILD AND EXTEND OUR BRAND AND ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY SUCH THAT A WIDE RANGE OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS – LOCAL PARTNERS, DONORS, LAWMAKERS, BOARD MEMBERS AND PROSPECTIVE FAMILIES – WILL RECOGNIZE THE SCHOOL’S NAME AS SYNONYMOUS WITH EXCELLENCE IN K-12 EDUCATION.

### GOALS:

1. RA will improve external communication through the development of a plan for active, ongoing participation on community events (and vice versa) and for promoting the school’s public brand.
2. RA will improve *internal communication* by leveraging and streamlining existing methods for connecting its students, parents and staff.

**GOAL #1: RA will improve external communication through the development of a plan for active, ongoing participation on community events (and vice versa) and for promoting the school’s public brand.**

#### **Short-Term**

- Formalize existing efforts around external communication through regular (semi-annual or quarterly) Communication Plan meeting. Conduct internal audit of current engagement strategies (local media, politicians, community leaders, voters, etc.) to determine effectiveness and use regular meetings to evaluate impact.
- Identify key community events in primary “sending districts” (Phoenixville, Spring-Ford, Downingtown, etc.) such as parades, street festivals, craft fairs, community service days and discuss RA participation options (including hosting events) with organizers and promoters.
- Contract with marketing firm to develop promotional video for website and digital marketing campaign (“We are RA”, Google Ads, etc.) during enrollment push in next 2 years.

#### **Long-Term**

- Expand community service activities currently taking place at individual grade levels to include all students K-12 through schoolwide Community Service Days and recurring partnerships with area charitable organizations.
- Develop ongoing strategic partnerships with higher education institutions and private businesses to foster internship and high-visibility sponsorships.

**“Our ultimate vision is to be a model for K-12 education in our city, state and region. We want to be defined by excellence and also inspire others to innovate and follow our lead.”**

*–Parent and Board Member*

**GOAL #2: RA will improve internal communication by leveraging and streamlining existing methods for connecting its students, parents and staff.**

**Short-Term**

- Continue to streamline communication via weekly news updates pushed out via redundant app-based distribution methods (text/email/call).
- Commit to Skyward and Google Classroom as exclusive methods for maintaining student information and hosting classroom resources and homework. Provide additional training as needed to teachers, and phase out all superfluous teacher-maintained websites by Summer 2022.
- Provide multiple parent trainings on utilizing these platforms in a variety of settings (start/middle/end of year, morning and evening, at school and in communities where families live, etc.).
- Reinforce differentiated training for new RA teachers/staff on procedural expectations, technology usage and cultural systems (“RA Lingo”, etc.) by utilizing Induction model and repeating mid-year (Dec/Jan). Build and annually maintain a digital folder of living resources for new staff members.



## CHALLENGE

BUILD UPON OUR EXTENSIVE TRACK RECORD OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS BY OFFERING ALL STUDENTS A WIDE RANGE OF RIGOROUS, COLLEGE-AND-CAREER-PREPARATORY COURSE OPTIONS USING RESEARCH-BASED, GOLD STANDARD TEACHING PRACTICES.

### GOALS:

1. RA will reenergize its college and career opportunities for Upper School students by highlighting existing programs and adding new STEAM-focused pathways.
2. RA will focus on elevating curricular rigor and academic extension through the design and implementation of new opportunities across the K-12 spectrum.
3. RA will support the cohesive and ongoing use of data to drive mission-critical decisions and achieve desired student outcomes.

**GOAL #1:** RA will reenergize its college and career opportunities for Upper School students by highlighting existing programs and adding new STEAM-focused pathways.

#### *Short-Term*

- Task 7-12 Counselor with coordination of comprehensive plan for 7-12 Career Pathways programming (Career Days, Industry-Specific Panels, Shadowing, Senior Internships, Work Release, Senior Projects, etc.).
- Utilize cohort of teachers trained using PA Smart Grant to assist administration in designing a series of course electives and afterschool clubs focused on STEAM fields (robotics, coding, financial literacy, engineering, graphic design, etc.). Utilize X-Block ("Extension Block") for students to receive either intervention/tutoring and/or extension activities. Research and identify external partners to provide during or after-school programs in the specialty areas listed above.
- Evaluate impact of introducing Naviance to middle grades (5th-7th) students to introduce variety of career pathways, electives and clubs to build interest and engagement at an earlier age. Track students from 7th grade through college completion (self-reported via counselor outreach) to measure program impact.





**GOAL #2: RA will focus on elevating curricular rigor and academic extension through the design and implementation of new opportunities across the K-12 spectrum.**

**Short-Term**

- Identify and highlight opportunities to introduce K-6 students to STEAM-focused, skilled trades professionals (cultivate new relationships/partners). Investigate potential providers for coding and science exploration at the LS level.
- Explore option of adding X-Block for Upper Elementary (grades 3-6) students with rotation for intervention, homework support and enrichment.

**Long-Term**

- Recruit US students to run extension clubs for LS students and/or serve as peer tutors and mentors.
- Foster explicit links between interdisciplinary grade-level projects (PBL) to STEAM and skilled trades.

**GOAL #3: RA will support the cohesive and ongoing use of data to drive mission-critical decisions and achieve desired student outcomes.**

**Short-Term**

- CEO, Principals & Middle Leaders communicate “cycle of inquiry” to full staff in August (data-driven goal setting, theory of change driving selection of PD topics, plans for data-gathering, observation and analysis of results, etc.).
- Incorporate regular opportunities for group and individual reflection on progress toward goals. Identify an administrator or committee that will plan regular (mid and end-of-year) “deep dives” into data and goal-tracking.

**Long-Term**

- Develop and implement (in Year 3) a Transition Plan for anticipated wave of new students (some of which will enter below grade level to intervene, support and acclimate to cultural expectations (multi-day “New Student Bootcamp”).
- Measure impact of measures above on student outcomes; adjust accordingly.

**“We’re preparing students for a future that’s constantly evolving, so we need to be more flexible than we’ve ever been in the types of courses we offer, the different pathways to graduation and course completion, and the types of experiences students get through internships, mentorships and work study.”**

*–Upper School Teacher*

## CUSTOMIZATION

DIVERSIFY OUR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS TO ENSURE THAT ALL STUDENTS RECEIVE A BROAD SPECTRUM OF UNIQUE EXPERIENCES, INCLUDING CUSTOMIZABLE COURSE OFFERINGS, STEAM PROGRAMMING, PERFORMING AND FINE ARTS, WORK-EMBEDDED AND PROJECT-BASED LEARNING.

### GOALS:

1. RA will expand its academic and extra-curricular offerings by developing enhanced opportunities for college and career preparation.
2. RA will integrate its emerging focus on STEAM and college-and-career preparation into its brand, messaging and facilities planning.

### **GOAL #1: RA will expand its academic and extra-curricular offerings by developing enhanced opportunities for college and career preparation.**

#### **Short-Term**

- Appoint a Career Pathways Task Force (or task an existing committee) to research, develop and implement flexible pathways (utilizing AP courses, dual enrollment, internships, independent study, etc.) for US students, ultimately leading to multiple endorsement options (graduation requirements remain unchanged; students can receive specialized endorsements in health sciences, business, law, engineering, education, entrepreneurship, etc.).

#### **Long-Term**

- Create ongoing opportunities for student-interns to showcase learning and work artifacts publicly.
- Build portfolio-based system for US students to showcase college/career readiness via public defense and community events ("Shark Tank"-style entrepreneurship program, science fairs/competitions, etc.).

### **GOAL #2: RA will integrate its emerging focus on STEAM and college-and-career preparation into its brand, messaging and facilities planning.**

#### **Short-Term**

- Revisit Mission, highlight existing elements (i.e., "Creativity", "Technological Sophistication") and integrate with marketing campaign materials and brand messaging.
- Integrate STEAM and College/Career Vision into facilities planning and design (STEAM Labs, Marquee w/ Logo, Performing and Visual Arts Center, "Wall of Fame" featuring STEAM-focused graduates of RACS, etc.).
- Organize a 20th Anniversary Committee to develop coordinated plan for outreach, fundraising, rebranding and facilities expansion.

## Success-Tracking Instruments

In order to prevent the foregoing goals and tasks from becoming merely aspirational – and to ensure the overall success of Renaissance Academy’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\***

- Are we making timely progress on our goals?
- Which individuals and teams are “owning” each of these tasks?
- Where do we need to (re)calibrate our initial thinking?

- **Strategic Metrics Dashboard**

- How are we ultimately measuring success?
- What does success look like in the short term (benchmark) versus long term?

- **5-Year Budget Model**

- Have we identified and aligned our resources to support this vision?
- Is our vision a sustainable one for the organization over time?

\*Renaissance Academy’s Leadership Team will, over the next 18 months, meet regularly with the Charter Choices team to review this tracker (and its accompanying budget) to promote accountability and momentum toward full implementation of the plan.

## Risk Mitigation

Renaissance Academy (“RA”) is a highly successful and established (now approaching its fourth charter renewal) brick-and-mortar public school of choice. Its fidelity of mission and track record of delivering on its promises to students and families are beyond question. The prospect of RA’s continued success is complicated, however, by a number of external obstacles and risks. RA’s board and leadership must negotiate and work to mitigate the impact of the following exposures if it wishes to achieve its inspiring vision for the next five (5) years:

### Changes to Special Education Funding

As the public discourse around school choice reaches a fever pitch in Harrisburg and in the media, it becomes increasingly important to prepare for what now appear to be inevitable changes to the Special Education funding formula. The Governor’s office – working at the behest of a highly influential teachers’ union – has proposed a new approach to rate calculation that would use a multiplier of 1.51x Regular Education funding rather than utilizing the prior year’s district Special Education expenses. This could result in a decrease in per pupil allocation for RA’s most vulnerable student to the tune of \$10-15,000/year.

- **Strategy #1** – Develop 5-year financial projections that incorporate both the status quo (less likely) and the Governor’s new multiplier (more likely). Identify a combination of potential cost savings and targeted enrollment growth that would allow the school to remain solvent even in the face of unfavorable legislation.
- **Strategy #2** – Educate RA Board Members, parents, staff and even students about the Governor’s proposal and the ways in which it would impact the students who need this funding the most. Join letter-writing and phone campaigns organized by PCPCS, invite legislators to visit the school, and carve out funds for targeted marketing (Facebook ads, etc.) to combat the dominant narrative around charter schools.

### Enrollment Required for Expansion

This is a “chicken and egg” problem, in the sense that the school’s desire to acquire new space (and/or redesign existing space) necessitates substantial enrollment growth (likely 40-60% over current figures). Conversely, the school’s efforts to attract and retain new students will require that it be prepared to undertake significant investments in time and financial resources in order to accommodate 500-600 new students and provide the level of innovation and customization that all students want and deserve.

- **Strategy #1** – Conduct a sensitivity analysis to determine how many new students can be added, and at what grade levels. What is the “break even point” for additional students required in order to accommodate the increased debt service and operational costs while maintaining a reasonably healthy fund balance and level of liquidity?
- **Strategy #2** – Develop a marketing and outreach strategy – perhaps led by an Expansion Committee – that engages in a multifaceted campaign (digital, radio, print, Open Houses, word-of-mouth) to reach the levels determined in Strategy #1 within the necessary timeframe.
- **Strategy #3** – Prepare an Expansion Timeline and Project Plan to manage the various “moving parts” of adding significant students and learning spaces. Identify and map out timelines and deliverables for hiring additional staff (including any new roles), making adjustments to existing operational procedures (transportation, meal service, arrivals/dismissals, maintenance, nursing care, administrative oversight of multiple sites, etc.), relocating furniture and offices, etc.

### Need for Increasingly Complex Student Services

RA’s rapidly shifting demographic – which includes an increasing number of students from low-income communities who may have encountered significant trauma and/or may be demonstrating early signs of emotional disturbance, anxiety, depression and other socioemotional exceptionalities – presents unique challenges and opportunities. Addressing students’ needs and supporting their development may require the addition of specially-trained professionals, investment in specialized technology and the allocation of dedicated learning spaces and offices.

- **Strategy #1** – As discussed previously, develop a 5-year model that accounts for an increase in dedicated staffing, supplies, technology, and furniture for Special Education students (which may, ironically, need to be paid for with a decreased level of tuition funding). Look at recent historical growth as a way to project future realities. Identify and pursue cost-effective measures wherever possible (i.e., psychologist who can provide both therapeutic counseling and evaluation services; use of graduate interns to provide small group intervention and support).
- **Strategy #2** – Identify and carve out dedicated spaces within RA’s new facilities plans for self-contained services for those students in need of them. This will serve the dual purposes of ensuring RA is prepared to deliver on the terms of its charter (and its mission) while providing cost savings as the school avoids paying tuition for expensive Approved Private Schools that these students might otherwise be compelled to attend at RA’s considerable expense.

### Competition from Other K-12 Charter Schools and Traditional Districts

One of the primary drivers behind the Strategic Planning Committee's desire to prioritize external communication and brand promotion is the need to establish a competitive advantage within the "school choice market" that is bolstered by public recognition and programmatic differentiation. Charter Choices has prepared a [Market Analysis](#) of RACS' primary "competitors" – two K-12 charter schools in Chester County and four area school districts that currently send the largest numbers of students to RACS. The analysis provides a qualitative overview of each competitor's programmatic features (what makes it effective and/or unique) and offers a window into how RACS' performance compares in terms of student enrollment, academic performance and financial health. Here are a few of the opportunities and challenges facing RACS as it continues to "compete" for students and families in the years ahead:

#### Opportunities & Challenges:

- RACS will need to prioritize the inclusion of dedicated STEM and performing arts-related laboratory or production space in any renovation or expansion planning in the near future.
- RACS should consider diversifying its "out-of-school" program offerings (extracurriculars, clubs, and especially summer camp experiences) as key differentiators for families considering options.
- The Upper School at RACS will need to more fully develop its "career and workplace learning" programming, including internships, mentoring, real-world projects, institutional partnerships (with hospitals, engineering, accounting and law firms, etc.) and dual enrollment courses. RACS should begin to gather longitudinal data on the success of its graduates to share with prospective students and families in future years.
- RACS should create opportunities to celebrate and recognize community partners in a variety of formats (sponsors for school events, interviews on student-run podcasts/radio shows, invitations to serve as panelists for Senior Projects or "Internship Showcase" nights, etc.).
- In its upcoming enrollment push, RACS will want to target its lower grades (K-6) where significant demand already exists across charter and district schools in Chester County. Similarly, RACS' marketing and outreach should focus on lower-performing districts where the highest demand already exists (Norristown, Phoenixville, Coatesville).

## I. CALL TO ACTION

### Family and Friends of Renaissance:

**W**elcome to Renaissance Academy! Perhaps you have been part of our community for 20+ years or perhaps you and your child are brand new Knights. Regardless of the time you have been with us, it is inherent in the RA Mission that our sights are always on the future. With each passing year, and with the ever changing climate of public education; the leaders of Renaissance have always sought a means to provide the quality education of our Founders' dreams in tandem with a precise focus on the long-term goals and learning for our students.

Our Vision is our truth each day and guides the direction and decisions made each step of the way. As our history indicates we pride ourselves in academic rigor and high expectations; but leave nothing to chance regarding the emotional and social growth of our students. A few moments in our classrooms or hallways leaves a visitor feeling welcome, warm and ready to learn more about what we do!

The following document report and plan provide an in depth review of all that is going on, going well, and going to happen! This report is the result of many hours of introspective work and discussions involving our students, families, staff and leaders. These groups were brought together over a series of meetings to dig deep into the goals and hopes of our stakeholders. Also present were ideas of the dreams for our future: some grand and some simple - all taking us closer to the Mission set forth in our Charter.

I invite you to delve into the findings and ask yourself, am I part of this history or will I be part of this future? What role do I want to play in the continued success of this school and how can I act now to guarantee that the students of PA have schools such as Renaissance as a choice, well into the future?

As a fellow Life Long Learner, I invite you to challenge yourself and join us on the trajectory of greatness that the Knights and Scholars of Renaissance walk along each day.

Yours in Life Long Learning,  
Dr. Guarino Buli



## **S**trategic Plan Committee Members:

**US = Upper School**  
**LS = Lower School**

### **Students:**

Jordan Alexander (US)  
Jayla DeJesus (US)  
Aidan Duong (US)  
Grace Grenier (US)  
Vinnie Johnson (US)  
Leo Kovaleski (LS)  
Sophia Marchionne (LS)  
Sage O'Brien (LS)  
John Prante (US)  
Reem Radwane (US)  
Nikitha Selvakumar (LS)  
Lucas Sullivan (US)

### **Administrators:**

Michelle Boyd (US Principal)  
David Cosme (Director of Achievement)  
Gina Guarino-Buli (CEO)  
Christine Herman (LS Principal)  
Harold Smith (Dean of Students)

### **Teachers:**

Rachel Cornelius (US Teacher/Middle Leader)  
Jennett Fassnacht (US Teacher/Middle Leader)  
Christopher Gebert (LS Teacher/Middle Leader)  
Amy James (US Teacher)  
Kelly Najdawi (Middle Leader)  
Heather Rinker (Middle Leader)  
Adrian Smith (US Teacher/Middle Leader)  
Karen Swan (US Teacher/Middle Leader)  
Kimberly Wheelles (LS Teacher/Middle Leader)

### **Parents/Board:**

Beth Falcone (Board Member/Parent)  
Shawn Glick (Board Member/Parent)  
Dan Rufo (Board President)