

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our starting point is community. Westside Atlanta Charter School (“WACS”) was established by neighbors, individuals and families that live in the growing Westside community of Atlanta, and we believe that a truly vibrant community can only exist with thriving, innovative schools.

### Westside Atlanta Charter School Mission Statement:

*Westside Atlanta Charter School exists to serve students, teachers and families within Atlanta’s Westside community. With language and literacy as the core of our curriculum, we provide a comprehensive learning experience that emphasizes the development of leadership among students, while challenging and encouraging educators to grow professionally and personally.*

### Westside Atlanta Charter School Vision Statement

*Westside Atlanta Charter School aspires to create a culture of service and leadership where students and educators grow in curiosity, critical thinking and creativity. We envision our school as a place of exceptional academic preparation and dynamic social engagement, with the goal of becoming an integral part of a vibrant community.*

Our innovative language and literacy focus will provide a firm educational foundation for the students we serve, enabling them to grow in leadership and character through applied learning opportunities. Each child entrusted to our care should leave our school ready to engage in meaningful ways with their broader community, having internalized our core values of imagination, rigor and service.

We are uniquely suited to successfully join the Westside’s education community and provide an additional quality schooling option for our neighbors, primarily because of the following:

Community Support- The WACS Board of Directors, Advisory Board and support network consist of committed parents and professionals including teachers, doctors, lawyers, school administrators, school psychologists, special education instructors, architects, developers, financiers and businesspersons, most of whom live on the Westside of Atlanta. The organic and local nature of our effort, as well as the diversity and experience of our committed volunteers, has given the WACS Board a high level of confidence that we will have the necessary human and financial capital to execute our mission. Additionally, three NPU’s that cover the vast majority of our target school area signed on to support our efforts and over 100 Atlanta residents signed a petition supporting our charter petition.

Proven Assets: WACS has developed a significant partnership with the Atlanta Speech School, a leader in language development and literacy in Atlanta since the 1930s. Specifically, the Atlanta Speech School’s Rollins Center for Language and Learning (the “Rollins Center”) will provide WACS with regular teacher training and professional development, and will work directly with our principal and our full-time literacy specialist to ensure that consistent and effective application of Rollins Center methodologies are consistently applied in the classroom. The Rollins Center has a strong track record as a professional development program that partners with public school systems and individual schools to provide teachers with innovative training, mentoring, and coaching, so that children will develop into proficient readers. Notably, the Rollins Center has achieved success in working with students from low-income situations similar to the population of students that reflects the socioeconomic diversity on the Westside. Our hope is to develop significant relationships with the other public schools on the Westside so that we might participate in a “community of professionals” and share professional development resources from the Rollins Center with other educators on the Westside.

Foundation of Literary and Language: We believe in language development and literacy, not to the exclusion of other subjects, but as the very tool that enables a child to fully embrace the complete learning experience. Lifetime learning begins with true ownership of language. The WACS

partnership with the Rollins Center brings an innovative yet proven approach to language learning. The WACS partnership is unique as the Rollins Center will provide an entire wrap-around approach to training and support from our school's very beginning in order to identify and address literacy issues, particularly by the third grade, and develop a vibrant community of readers and writers. Our teachers will bring science, math, social studies, music and art into the vocabulary, reading and writing assignments and, in turn, will exercise writing and language expression skills in delivering content from the other disciplines. Our language and literacy focus will thus serve as a strong foundation for the entirety of each student's academic pursuits.

Educational growth through leadership development: All WACS students will learn through a leadership lens that invites them to serve their community. This focus on leadership development will be most evident in the applied learning opportunities that bring *local* applications to our curriculum through direct collaboration between our teachers, students and local business leaders. For instance, a science lesson might focus on the workings of the Atlanta Water Treatment plant or a growth cycle in the WACS community garden; a math lesson might center around a Westside merchant's problem of how much merchandise to stock. We are seeking to create citizens with problem solving and self-management skills that they can apply to their local communities. We believe that a child's interest in and application of lessons will be most relevant when they take place in and among their community.

Additionally, each fifth grade class and each eighth grade student will complete a capstone project. The fifth grade project will address a Westside issue that will draw upon the curriculum and will prepare students for the writing assessment. Through this project, students will learn to self-identify their skills and understand them context of a team, learn to work with a team and learn to communicate their findings in an informational and persuasive manner to peers and leaders. Eighth graders will similarly address a Westside community issue, but will do so independently with the support of a business mentor assigned in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Through this project, students will learn to identify unique problems, conduct independent research and self-manage time. Finally, students will memorialize their work through oral presentations and writings that will culminate the WACS student portfolio.

### **Why the "Westside"?**

Our community is a beautiful mix of the old and the new. Northwest Atlanta, defined roughly as the 30318 zip code has grown rapidly in recently years with the addition of brand new residential units in neighborhoods alongside some of the Westside's historic neighborhoods. Developments such as Atlantic Station and White Provisions are drawing new residents to the area, while the nearby Beltline, including the proposed 300-acre Westside Park, promises to bring additional dwelling units, many of which will provide affordable housing, to an area less than one mile from the proposed school location. WACS seeks to align our investment of educational resources with Atlanta's investment in the Westside in order to best serve residents, old and new alike, by capitalizing on the tremendous diversity, transportation infrastructure, outdoor spaces, and other community assets that exist and are continuing to develop in our community.

There are currently no charter school options that are located within the 30318 zip code. Significantly, there currently exists a tremendous disparity in racial and socio-economic characteristics between neighborhoods and schools in the north (Buckhead) and south (Bankhead) portions of our zip code, a disparity exasperated by the gap in test scores for these schools and the fact that enrollment is climbing on one side of this divide and falling on the other. We believe that WACS will offer a meaningful option for parents in our area, enabled by waiver freedom from existing school zoning so that we can participate in bringing the students in these diverse neighborhoods together.