RICHMOND HEIGHTS LOCAL SCHOOLS

IT'S A NEW DAY FOR THE RICHMOND HEIGHTS WAY



Dr. Renee T. Willis ***Marnisha Brown***

LEVERAGING **OUR STRENGTHS!**

Richmond Heights Local School District's
5 year Strategic Plan for
2023-24 through 2027-28

This plan was created under the leadership of Dr. Willis
and transitioned to the leadership of Mrs. Brown in January 2024



IT'S A NEW DAY FOR
THE RICHMOND HEIGHTS WAY

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Mission Statement:

To prepare individual learners to navigate an evolving global community using 21st century competencies.

Vision Statement:

Richmond Heights is a first-choice school district providing an equitable educational environment that promotes safe, respectful, responsible relationships where pride in self, school, and community flourishes.

* LEVERAGING OUR STRENGTHS: Richmond Heights Local School District's Plan for 2024 – 2028 was developed as a five-year plan. As noted in the "Next Steps" section of this report, the Superintendent and Board President will provide oversight and leadership in coordinating strategic plan implementation over this 60-month period and will involve the full Board in determining high-level timing for each of the 16 objectives that make up the plan; for example, which objectives will be activated during the first 90 days of implementation, what happens during 2024, during 2025, and so on. Through this careful implementation oversight, if it is determined that this plan can be effectively completed in a short period of time, timing adjustments will be made. The next strategic planning process will likely begin during the last year of implementation of LEVERAGING OUR STRENGTHS

LEVERAGING OUR STRENGTHS

RICHMOND HEIGHTS LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT'S PLAN FOR SY 2024 – SY 2028

I. About the Richmond Heights Local School District

The Richmond Heights Local School District (RHLSD) is an inner ring suburb of Cleveland, Ohio that has experienced rapid demographic shifts. The overall student population has held steady over the past five years with an enrollment of approximately 850 students. An initial decline was seen with the introduction of vouchers from approximately 1,000 students to its current enrollment. Our student body is over 90% African American with approximately 75% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. Approximately 13% of the student body is identified as having a special educational need and 3% of the student population has limited English proficiency.

The RHLSD has made great strides with the implementation of the last strategic plan. The district has 8 full time administrators with other administrative services coming by way of purchased services from outside vendors or entities. The superintendent, Dr. Willis has been in position since August 2014 and most of her cabinet members have been with her for over 6 years. The teaching staff has approximately 55 full time teachers with a few contracted services to deliver such instruction as Gifted, ESL and Speech. The support staff include approximately 14 instructional aides for special education; a nurse, 12 bus drivers and 3 school secretaries.

After coming out of Fiscal Watch and upgrading its Standard & Poor's Rating, the district was able to pass an unprecedented 12.08 mil levy in the fall of 2017. The levy provided the funding for the new 21st Century Community Learning Center that serves students in grades 7-12 and houses the Cuyahoga County Library - Richmond Heights Branch. The academic trajectory of RHLSD was on a steady incline until the pandemic hit in 2020. The district had reached a Graduation Grade of "B", up from a "D" with the class of 2019. The school district has been a staunch advocate for public education, particularly for districts with similar demographics. Richmond Heights is currently a lead plaintiff in the lawsuit against the Ohio Department of Education and the State of Ohio regarding the unconstitutionality of the current voucher program.

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Although the district is very stable, it recognizes how many dynamics are intertwined and potentially volatile, and that they must be provoked to exhibit a fierce sense of urgency if they are to regain the trajectory of success that they have recently experienced, as COVID-19 has caused them and many others to slide back a bit. As a small school district located within a small community, they have proven that they are able to "pivot on a dime" through quick, strategic, and deliberate action. With a comprehensive planning initiative, driven by a commitment to continuing to advance our 21st century system, they will be able to provide the families of Richmond Heights with the best choice for educating their children. They have no other option but to reinvent their school system, as the pandemic has forced them to realize a "new normal".

(Provided by Richmond Heights Local School District)

The Richmond Heights Local School District (RHLSD) retained the services of Janus Small Associates (JSA) (with Janus Small, Pam Fine, and Tiffany Scruggs serving as the JSA leads on this project) to facilitate development of a five-year strategic plan for the RHLSD through a comprehensive, responsive to today's realities and participatory visioning and planning process. The strategic planning process addresses the period of SY 2024 – SY 2028.

II. The Planning Process – Format and Findings

The RHLSD strategic planning committee included members of the RHLSD Board of Education, staff, parents, city leaders, and community representatives:

- Dr. Patricia Ackerman
- Frank Barber
- Ronald Barnes
- Jacky C. Brown, Sr.
- Marnisha Brown
- Cameron Campbell
- Martin Cooper
- Trudy Compton
- Monica Crosby
- Angel Dinh
- Lori Gecina
- Raetrell George
- Theodore Ginn III
- Patricia Grady
- Samantha Hunt
- Nneka Slade Jackson
- Trina Johnson
- Bobby Jordan
- Tim King
- Judy McElroy
- Nichole McWilliams
- Nicholas McWilliams
- Linda Pliodzinskas
- Pastor Alan Schrader
- Tera Stewart
- Mayor Kim Thomas
- Cedvion Thornton
- Alyssa Thorpe
- Dr. Hugh Turner
- Katrina Watford
- Teresa Williams
- Dr. Renée Willis
- Deja Winters
- Penelope Zolda

There are many factors that determine just how in-depth any given strategic planning process should be, for example:

- A school district's resources (time, money, people)
- Leaderships shifts within a school district
- External requirements (funding agencies, etc.)
- Level of satisfaction of those being served by a school district and those providing the service
- Significant shifts internally within the district and/or external community (including the impact of COVID 19 and significant racial justice efforts)



A planning process can be designed to be both comprehensive and thorough on a variety of levels. Therefore, it is most important to develop a process with a scope matching the needs of a school district at a given point in time. With ongoing input from the strategic planning committee, the consultants structured a planning process best suited to the current capacity and needs of the RHLSD. Following the consultants' in-depth review of selected RHLSD materials (most recent strategic plan, Board of Education meeting minutes, curriculum and evaluation materials, budgetary materials, marketing/public relations materials as examples), the planning process formally began with consultant-conducted one-on-one interviews with the members of the RHLSD Board members to solicit their input around the five current strategic plan goals, strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-challenges for RHLSD, and key focus areas for the planning process. After the one-on-one interviews, the first strategic planning committee work session took place in October of 2022, followed by four additional comprehensive strategic planning committee work sessions held between late 2022 and early summer 2023. Along with the one-on-one interviews, to inform the work of the strategic planning committee, the facilitators/consultants: conducted interviews with community representatives, funders, and government officials, and surveyed the RHLSD staff (teachers, certified staff, and classified staff), parents, and students.

A "Key Issues and Themes to Address during Strategic Planning" document was developed after the RHLSD Board interviews and was continually refined and updated during strategic planning work sessions based on additional input from community interviews and surveys. A SWOT analysis was developed in the same manner - Board input, interview and survey input, and committee input. These two documents, found on pages 6 through 8 of this report, served as the foundation for the strategic planning process.



"With ongoing input from the strategic planning committee, the consultants structured a planning process best suited to the current capacity and needs of the RHLSD."

RHLSD – Key Issues/Themes to Address in Strategic Planning Process
(As determined by Board and community interviews, staff, parent, and student surveys, and at strategic planning committee work sessions)

Key Issues
1. **Selling our Story** - We support public schools, we support RHLSD public schools, RHLSD has many great achievements. Increase the ability to communicate our achievements and successes; we have successes but need to be better at sharing this information beyond the report card; must work on messaging around our achievements year-round.
2. **Leveraging our New Building** - As a community center, library, hold students' performances, extracurricular activities, learning and social experiences for kids and community.
3. **Student Achievement** - Acknowledge and promote the growing student achievement, monitor more, and measure success in new and different ways. Eliminate barriers created for students, families, teachers by COVID. Getting students academically caught up and address social-emotional /mental health aspects to eliminate any hindrance to academic success; address professional development needs of teachers, socio - economic range, be adaptable to varying student needs, trauma-informed development, and more.
4. **Parent and Community Engagement** - What does parent involvement mean, what does it look like? Supporters in addition to parents will show up when you ask them to – but how do you move the needle in engaging individuals and other partners/current and potential, such as the library, airport, businesses, nonprofits; how to help them be more inclined to help us move forward our mission and vision?
5. **Political Climate and Community Advocacy** - How to inform the overall community and guide them in how to address the political negativity towards public schools; guide them in how to make their voices heard, how they can help with this imminent threat. What we believe, what we teach, how we operate, considering recently elected Ohio House members, powers of State Board of Education, teaching our students their history – strong and clear about what we teach. Include "here is what this district does and will continue to do" – organizing, importance of public schools.
6. **Race and How Race and Equity Impact our Schools -** There is much diversity, including diversity within the race; commit to curriculum being taught so that each child can connect with their own culture and know their history; school district's demographic does not reflect the city's demographic; address equity; explore policies/Board policy regarding equity.

7. **Capital Project/Elementary school** – What is the plan for the elementary school? Upper school has lots of innovation; what do we have planned for the elementary school?

Richmond Heights Local School District (RHLSD)
Strengths - Weaknesses - Opportunities – Threats

Strengths – What RHLSD does best.	Weaknesses – Things you consider deficient and need to be improved on within RHLSD.
• **Size of the school district** – really get to know our students well; like a small community; nimble; small class sizes • **Dr. Willis is phenomenal -** her internal team and the Circle of Believers are as well (Board, community members) • **Very resilient group -** RHLSD has the ability to pivot and to bounce back • **Community involvement -** including parents, PTA, others • **Great, committed teachers** • **Low employee attrition** • **New building/new technology** • **Student engagement options -** including lots of opportunities regarding career paths (college tours, leadership programs, extracurriculars) • **Safety in the schools -** is excellent including enforcement of student behavior policies • **Communications -** keeping all up to date, newsletters, website called FinalForms is used to update students and parents on what is going on during the week; picture retake day, upcoming college field trips, dates to take PSATs, etc.	• **Ability to communicate our achievements and successes -** we have successes but need to be better at sharing this information beyond the report card; must work on messaging around achievement • **Allocation of public funds -** funding is a big issue; like others in Cuyahoga County, not having enough funding hurts our ability to serve our students • We want our students to have the **same opportunities as more affluent districts** • **broad socio-economic range** of families within the City of RH; how to address the challenges but also how to address this range in a positive way • Ability to support and address the needs of **children who have experienced trauma** • **Human Capital** - we are small, and we wear multiple hats, which may cause a lack of fidelity to some programs/processes • **Employee salaries -** lower than other districts • Growth in numbers of **transient students** • **Limited extracurricular** programs • **Inconsistent state funding** • **Need to find a way to invest more in the elementary schools** • **Communication/transparency**. Because the district and community is small and has a close knit/family culture a lot of information is shared on a smaller scale when the effort is to be inclusive. The culture is great but communication could be enhanced (this is a strength and weakness)

Opportunities – Factors which have potential to benefit RHLSD in the future.	Threats – External factors RHLSD cannot control but they may cause negative/adverse effects to RHLSD now or in the future.
• **Recent new construction -** programming we can offer as a result of the new facility; leverage the new facility, tournaments, community gathering place • **Deepen relationship with the City of RH** • **Messaging around achievement** • **Activate the community to vote -** to educate the community on how we can affect change regarding school funding • Live into truly being a **"boutique" school system** • More **community engagement -** with more events or opportunities for the community to come together; **Community** to come to our beautiful new facility and the opportunities it presents but also for our school (children, staff, facility) to go out into the community • More **field trips to our businesses, non-profits, nursing homes**, etc. • Create and share our **story of success** • **Not focusing on the local school report card** (running the test score race) but rather on strong Tier 1 core instruction with fidelity and consistency • Cross-cultural **communication** • **Create college or employment pathways** in local community through partnerships • **Strengthen alumni network** • **Recruit top academic and athletic students with comprehensive marketing campaign** • **Create hybrid system** of education • **Thinking outside the box with programs like the Twilight School** that addresses the needs of select students and measures success in a different way	• **Political climate** at the national and state levels • **Political attack on public schools** • **Multiple impacts of COVID** on student growth and development • **Older community** base not invested in school • **Diversity in school does not reflect community** (this speaks to community perception) • **Charter schools** (marketing directly to our students) 

Throughout the strategic planning process, the strategic planning committee revisited the RHLSD mission and vision statements several times and, after comprehensive discussion, the committee enthusiastically recommitted to both statements as follow:

Mission Statement: **Prepare individual learners to navigate an evolving global community using 21st century competencies.**

Vision Statement: **Richmond Heights is a first-choice school district providing an equitable educational environment that promotes safe, respectful, responsible relationships where pride in self, school, and community flourishes.**

To animate the mission statement and develop a roadmap to fully activate Richmond Heights Local School District's commitment to embrace growing student achievement and innovation, and to deepen current and develop new and meaningful connections with the community, the following four goals were developed.

GOAL ONE: Deepen community awareness of and authentic engagement with the Richmond Heights Local School District (RHLSD).

GOAL TWO: Equitably grow student achievement with focus, innovation, and resources.

GOAL THREE: Embrace and celebrate the diversity (socio economic, race, religion, ethnicity, more) of the RHLSD and city.

GOAL FOUR: Create an actionable plan for an innovative new elementary school designed to meet the specific needs of the Richmond Heights community.

Related objectives – defined, operational, and specific – have been developed for each of the goals beginning on page 10. Action steps for each objective will be developed during the implementation process by the "implementation lead."

***GLOSSARY: (for use when reviewing pages 10 - 14)**

Goals are broad expressions of what you want to achieve. They are expressed in general terms and will state the ultimate purpose of what is to be realized. Goals are what must be attained in total, or in some combination, in order to achieve some overall result.

Objectives are specific accomplishments that must be realized in order to achieve the goals in the plan. They are planned accomplishments, not planned activities.

Action steps are concrete specific, and everyday actions necessary to meet the objectives. Action steps will be incremental, realistic, and easy to implement and measure as part of the work plan. Action steps and related metrics will be developed by the implementation lead for each objective.

The person(s) and/or committee(s) or other group(s) that is/are listed under the **Implementation Lead(s)** column is accountable to move the assigned objective forward. Please note that others including Board members. staff members, and/or expert contractors will very likely be involved in the work as well with oversight, leadership, and in-depth involvement from the Superintendent and Board Chair and/or their designees.

LEVERAGING OUR STRENGTHS!

Richmond Heights Local School District's 5 year Strategic Plan for SY 2023-24 through SY 2027-28

Goals and Objectives	Ideas for Action Steps	Implementation Lead(s)
Goal One: Deepen community awareness of and authentic engagement with the Richmond Heights Local School District (RHLSD).		
1A. Develop and implement a multi-faceted communications plan including messaging and tools to actively share the successes of the RHLSD within Richmond Heights and beyond.	• Need a dedicated person on the ground providing content - communications liaison (dual roles for spokesperson and more) • Address disconnect between press releases, social media, website, one clear issue • Request Board approval-make this a priority, a budget priority • Explore partnerships with colleges and universities • Allerton Hill Communications in Columbus does this work now as a contractor; we send them content • Develop succession plan document for leadership to ensure continuity for the community for all RHLSD initiatives	• Board and Superintendent

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1B. Create intentional policies and plan by which we can leverage the new building as an active community hub, bringing in people of all ages, interests, and backgrounds to use RHLSD's diverse spaces.	• Focus on community engagement and a variety of ways to reach community based on survey input • Bridge with City/City Council • Need a policy around use and payment; liquor policy for event rentals (i.e. receptions)	• Director of Operations • Concerned Taxpayers Organization
1C. Create additional and varied opportunities for family/parent involvement and for business/organization involvement with the schools, together working to move RHLSD's mission and vision forward.	• Consider Meijers and other key businesses • Make sure teachers know about the businesses and about key elected officials and other key connections • Explore unique opportunities for students • Grow foundation in size and scope of services • Bolster the boosters, need a fundraising organization • Explore naming rights and scholarships	• Superintendent and City Economic and Community Affairs staff leaders
1D. Expand our network of funders and funding opportunities to support the RHLSD and its students.	• Collaborate with high school and middle school student councils • Prioritize efforts to collaborate with the education foundation (501 c 3) - involve more parents and teachers • Develop and implement plan to grow foundation	• Utilize consulting Grant Writers to identify and seek applicable grants. • Increase partnerships that could provide financial assistance for targeted initiatives.
Goal Two: Equitably grow student achievement with focus, innovation, and resources.		
2A. Develop and implement plans to address the negative impact of COVID around academic success, social emotional learning, and overall mental health and trauma.	• Train teachers on trauma informed initiatives • Implement intentional, innovative strategy to accelerate early childhood learning • Deepen literacy focus of PreK experience	• Board and Superintendent • Director of Educational Services
2B. Research and shape tools and opportunities to monitor and measure success in meaningful, new, and different ways.	• Solicit teacher and students input as well as that of administration as well as alums • Develop tools to be monitored by Administration • Review survey responses	• Board and Superintendent

	• Solicit parent input when deciding indicators • Create narrative around student empowerment REACH, Look Up to Cleveland and more to include in annual state of the schools • Address early literacy immersion	
2C. Create a coherent instructional framework. 	• Provide training, coaching, and other professional development offerings for teachers around curriculum and related needs, including but not limited to social, emotional, and trauma issues • Continue to keep curriculum needs as the foundation for student achievement • Support teachers in finding and participating in relevant trainings; this is especially important with smaller departments as teachers need someone to bounce ideas off of • Provide grade level training in core curricular areas. • Continue major content area curriculum adoption cadence • Develop formal scope and sequence for K-12.	• Building principals • ESC SST 3 • Content Area Consultants
2D. Explore and further develop opportunities to expand early literacy initiatives including partnerships with nonprofit agencies throughout Cuyahoga County as appropriate.	• Connect with Family Connections/Cuyahoga County Public Library (CCPL) • Consider this as an opportunity for new role for current staff member • Use example of library investments	• FACE Consultant and WrapAround Coordinator
2E. Deepen current and develop new partnerships with the businesses in the community with a focus on career pathways for students.	• Expand job shadowing and internships • Expand manufacturing pathways • Revive aviation pathway	• Career Connections Teacher • GCCC (Greater Cleveland Career Consortium)

Goal Three: Embrace and celebrate the diversity (socio economic, race, religion, ethnicity, more) of the RHLSD and city.		
3A. Develop and adopt an equity policy to guide our work. (see Equity Statement in Appendix)	• Create procedures to seek feedback from employees, students and community members to determine the effectiveness of the policy.	• Board and Board Consultant • Diversity Taskforce/Committee
3B. Deepen connections with RHLSD alums with the district and with students.	• Outreach to alums with emphasis on past school presidents and form a committee; start an alumni hall of fame • Involve current students and their siblings who are current grads to forge some connections • Develop clear policies around the hall of fame and alumni work	• Foundation • Secondary school counselor • Dr. Ackerman
3C. Create and activate intentional partnerships involving representatives from the City of Richmond Heights, RHLSD Board of Education members and student peer to peer to explore our community's diversity.	• Develop a steering committee to guide this work • Create and activate an intentional plan	• Superintendent and Mayor
Goal Four: Create an actionable plan for an innovative new elementary school designed to meet the specific needs of the Richmond Heights community.		
4A. Provide opportunities for community input and provide regular updates regarding the future school as well as interim operations plans.	• Involve parent committees, Engaged Spartan Parents (ESP), and other community members and Board • Solicit teacher input regarding their informational needs • Prepare engaging new vision statement for this major initiative: Where we are – where are we going – from traditional and "antiquated" to "new vision"	• Board President and Superintendent
4B. Complete Phase II of the Master Facility Plan by envisioning a new 21st Century Elementary School.	• Plan for 2028 groundbreaking or ribbon-cutting.	• Board President, Superintendent and Treasurer

4C. Complete a comprehensive review of the Treasurer's Office to ensure sustainability.	• Strategically align treasury services to ensure optimal efficiencies (i.e. budgeting process, procurement, payroll, etc.)	• NCSSA (North Coast Shared Services Alliance)
4D. Create and develop comprehensive funding plan and calendar for implementation of this funding plan.	• Prioritize a funding campaign inclusive of all stakeholders.	• Board and Treasurer





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VI. Next Steps

The Richmond Heights Local School District strategic planning process was quite thorough and participatory. In addition to the strategic planning committee, the process included direct input from over 200 people. This input was supplemented by studies and reports from local, regional and national sources.

To implement **LEVERAGING OUR STRENGTHS** incrementally over the next five years – SY 2024 through SY 2028 - it is recommended that to get started:

A. The Superintendent and Board President **provide oversight and leadersihp in coordinating strategic plan implementation** over the 60-month period.

B. The Superintendent and Board **determine high-level timing for each of the 16 objectives** that make up the plan; for example, which objectives will be activated during the first 90 days of implementation, what happens during 2024, during 2025, during 2026, during 2027, and during 2028?



C. Individuals, committees, and/or other groups noted in the Implementation Lead(s) column for each objective to be activated during 2024 **meet and develop specific action steps to be implemented to move the objective forward during 2024**. Please note that (1) suggestions for action steps developed by the strategic planning committee can be found in the center column of the goals and objectives chart beginning on page 10 (2) completion of some objectives may be started and completed in a matter of weeks while others will be on-going over a period of months or years.

Overall, **LEVERAGING OUR STRENGTHS** is very specific to the current and future needs and interests of the Richmond Heights community. The plan will clearly guide RHLSD to making its vision a reality: ***Richmond Heights is a first-choice school district providing an equitable educational environment that promotes safe, respectful, responsible relationships where pride in self, school, and community flourishes.***

APPENDIX:

This was developed immediately upon completion of LEVERAGING OUR STRENGTHS, therefore it is included as part of this plan document.

RHLSD EQUITY STATEMENT

The Richmond Heights Local School District (RHLSD) firmly believes that diversity is our greatest strength**.** We are committed to fostering an intentional and positive schoolwide culture that nurtures strong school and community pride, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Every student is encouraged to thrive through the discovery and cultivation of their gifts in a learning environment where there is opportunity to be actively engaged in challenging instruction that is tailored to their strengths, interests and needs. This educational experience provides students with the necessary resources to meet their academic and holistic requisite for daily success.

We hold an unwavering commitment to appreciate and value each member of our school community. We strive to model inclusivity, accountability, and transparency, while demonstrating sound fiscal management and effective resource utilization. In our pursuit of educational equity, a continuous and collaborative effort to assess various aspects of our district programs and operations is required. The RHLSD is focused on providing the opportunity for open and honest communication with student, family and community. Engagement and collaboration towards the realization of our educational goals are essential to the pillars of equity . The result-will be a continuous transformation of our strategic plan that is responsive to and reflective of stakeholder input.

Our holistic approach to education empowers students to excel academically, build meaningful relationships, engage as responsible citizens, and embrace global perspectives. Through perseverance at all levels in the RHLSD, we uphold our legacy of high performance and remain dedicated to shaping a brighter future for all by leveraging our core beliefs.

CORE BELIEFS

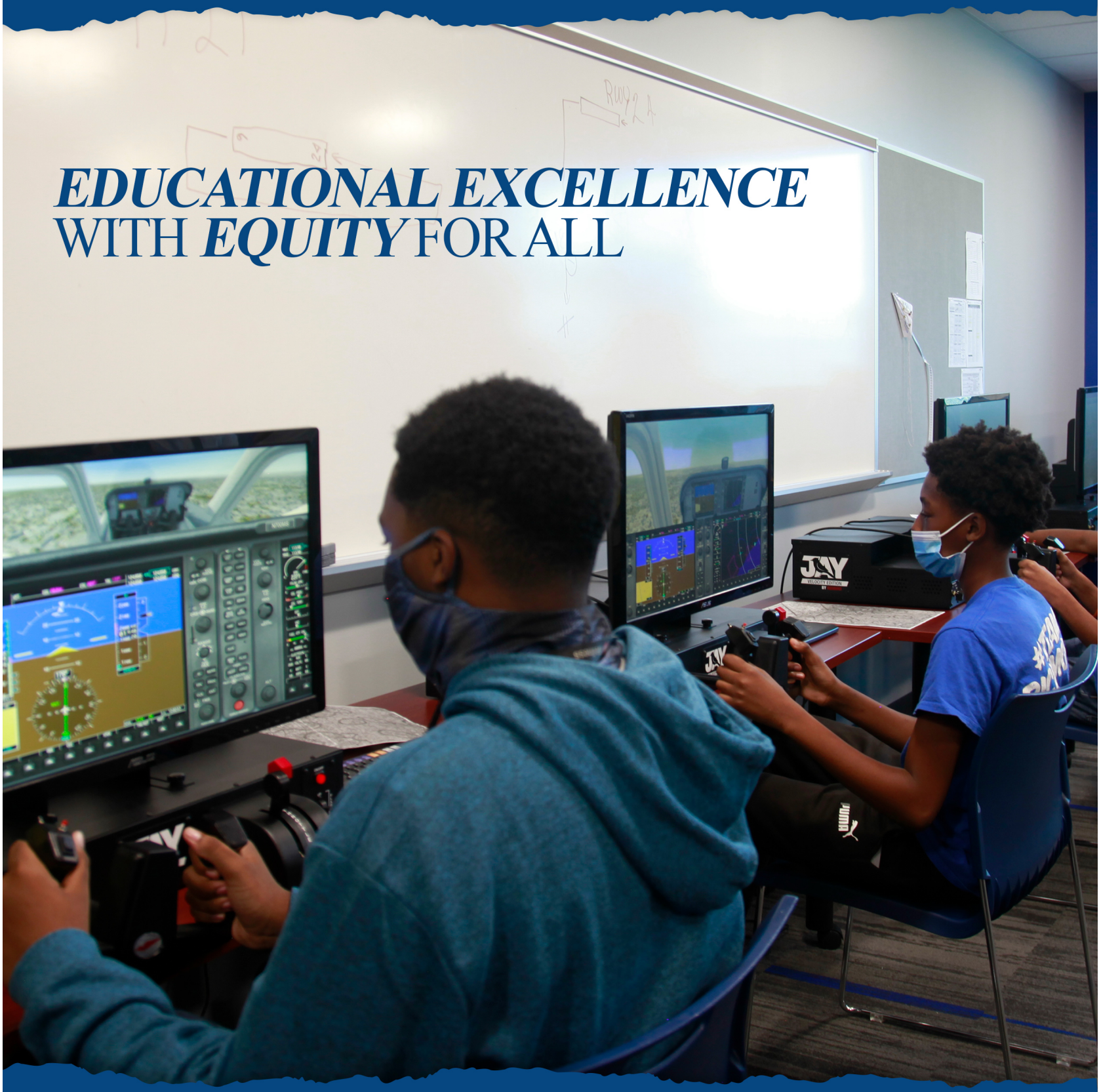
- **Diversity as Strength:** We embrace diversity as a cornerstone of our identity, recognizing that our collective differences enrich our community and enhance learning experiences.
- **Cultivating School Culture:** Through intentional efforts, we foster a positive school culture that cultivates strong school pride and empowers each individual to contribute their unique strengths.
- **Appreciation and Valuing:** Every member of the Richmond Heights community is valued and appreciated, ensuring an inclusive environment where all voices are heard and respected.

- **Accountability and Transparency:** We uphold a culture of accountability, holding ourselves responsible for our actions and decisions, and maintaining transparency in all aspects of our operations.
- **Responsible Resource Management:** We exercise prudent fiscal responsibility, ensuring that resources are managed efficiently to support our educational mission and secure a sustainable future.



- **Holistic Student Success:** Our commitment extends beyond academics, guiding students to succeed academically, build meaningful relationships, engage as responsible citizens, and embrace global perspectives.
- **Partnerships for Success:** Involvement of parents and community partners is essential in achieving our educational objectives, as collaboration strengthens our impact and enriches learning opportunities.
- **Commitment to Improvement:** We embrace a culture of continuous improvement at all levels, dedicating ourselves to refining our practices, fostering high performance, and leaving a lasting legacy of excellence.

EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE WITH *EQUITY* FOR ALL





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Board President

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Board Vice President

Jacky C. Brown, Sr.
Board Member

Linda Pliodzinskas
Board Member

Dr. Hugh A. Turner
Board Member

Cooper Martin
Treasurer