

**Atlanta Public Schools
Superintendent's Preliminary Proposal to
Strengthen Middle Grades Education in the Jackson Cluster
April 14, 2014**

Background

While improving all middle grades education remains a priority for Atlanta Public Schools, declines in enrollment and community buy-in have prompted a more immediate need for a resolution in the Maynard Jackson High School Cluster.

The Jackson cluster has two feeder middle schools. Both schools are underutilized in a school system where staff and other critical resources are tied to student enrollment. Sammye E. Coan Middle School has a current population of approximately 260 students. The facility is designed to hold 1,025 students. There are 441 students living in the Coan zone, which means approximately 50 percent of the in-zone students attend Coan. Within the next five years, Coan attendance is not estimated to exceed 300 students. Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School has a population of an estimated 460 students in a building that is designed to hold 1,000 students. Of the 718 students living in the King zone, nearly 60 percent of the students attend King.

When a school campus has a larger enrollment, the school is allotted additional staffing. As a result, the school can offer students a variety of opportunities that cannot be provided in the current structure, such as a multitude of sports, clubs, band, chorus and orchestra.

To strengthen students' learning experiences, the district has engaged the community in several rounds of community meetings, in addition to a survey with online responses to solicit community input in defining solutions for obtaining the entire cluster's commitment to a workable middle grades education solution. This proposal has been informed by feedback from parents, teachers, principals, community members and partners.

Proposal

One Middle School

Combine Coan and King middle schools at the end of the 2013-14 school year. Students at Coan and King middle schools would merge to form a new Jackson cluster middle school. Students in the newly formed middle school would be located at the Coan campus for one to two years while King receives a major \$10 million to \$20 million renovation from current SPLOST funds to reflect current design principles for educational facilities. Enhanced student supports and social services (e.g., security, social worker, counselors, etc.) would be added at the Coan building as part of an active plan to ensure a smooth transition for all students.

A strong transitional team will be designated to include school leadership, parents, students and central office representatives to ensure a successful transition. Starting in July 2014, the middle school and high school principals would lead a six-month discussion with the school and community leadership of all of the schools in the cluster to define and design the type of rigorous, innovative programming they would want to see implemented at the new middle school. Topics for discussion could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Creating a clear vision for the new middle school
- Enhancing school culture, perception and accountability
- Developing a full pathway for the cluster
- Securing job-based learning opportunities
- Engaging a university partner
- Providing advanced or remedial support for all students
- Increasing professional development opportunities for teachers
- Determining resources needed

During the second six months, this group would collaborate with the district to seek to involve a university partner in developing a potential teaching lab school agreement. The group would also assist in determining a process for repurposing the Coan site. Several ideas have been presented for the repurposing of the site, including a professional learning center, a pre-K center and a career academy.

The overall goal for this planning period would be to gain the consensus and buy-in of the combined Coan and King communities to make a preeminent middle school for the Jackson cluster. Students would return to the new campus during the 2016-17 school year. The principal would be able to choose new school staff for the new middle school.