

2024 - 2025
ANNUAL REPORT



ANNA JULIA COOPER
SCHOOL



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A Message From Our Head of School

As the stories, snapshots, photographs, and financial information in these pages reflect, 2024–2025 was another great year at Anna Julia Cooper School. Community and relationships remain at the heart of who we are. I am grateful for the vantage point I have as Head of School—to witness our community at work each day, whether here on 29th Street or in the far-flung places where our hundreds of graduates now live, learn, and work. Everyone matters. We believe all staff, parents, volunteers, and donors are integral to our success as a school and a community of affection.

Those who know me best know that I am increasingly moved by the work and message of Father Greg Boyle, Founder and Director of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles. I want AJC to be like Homeboy—a place rooted in kinship, dignity, and belonging. This past year, for the second time, we were fortunate to welcome Fr. Greg, along with two of his “homies,” to speak to our community—an experience that continues to resonate with me and with many others.

With a bit of poetic license, these words from Fr. Greg capture my own hopes for the AJC community:

“At AJC folks are ‘won by warmth, ripened affectionately.’ I walk in the door and there it is—the aroma of kinship. The fundamental ethos is ‘walking with,’ not ‘doing for.’ The magic happens in the lobby, nearest the swinging of the door. We all walk in the door and, together, stare at our own shared ruin, and we choose to walk as kin. We find a new spacious way of seeing. In the culture of tenderness, we discover the authority in our own voice, and our true and sacred selves. In the process we find a love that can go anywhere it wants.”

I have seen that love—the kind that “can go anywhere it wants”—most clearly in the colleagues I have had the privilege to work alongside at AJC, many of whom are highlighted in these pages. More than a decade and a half into this work, I still look to them to understand what love in action truly looks like. Together with a small army of volunteers, support staff, and partner organizations, they are responsible for whatever magic happens here each day.

This year also marked a season of momentum and intentional transition. In late spring, we broke ground on our new Lower School building—a visible sign of growth and a major investment in the future of our youngest students. I also shared with our community that I plan to retire at the end of the 2025–2026 school year. I do so with deep gratitude and great confidence, knowing that AJC is strong, mission-centered, and ready for what comes next. The work of this school has never rested on one person; it is driven by a community of shared leadership, people doing their part, and looking out for each other. My role in the year ahead is, in many ways, to help pass the baton—ensuring that AJC continues to thrive, guided by the same values, relationships, and sense of purpose that have shaped us from the beginning.

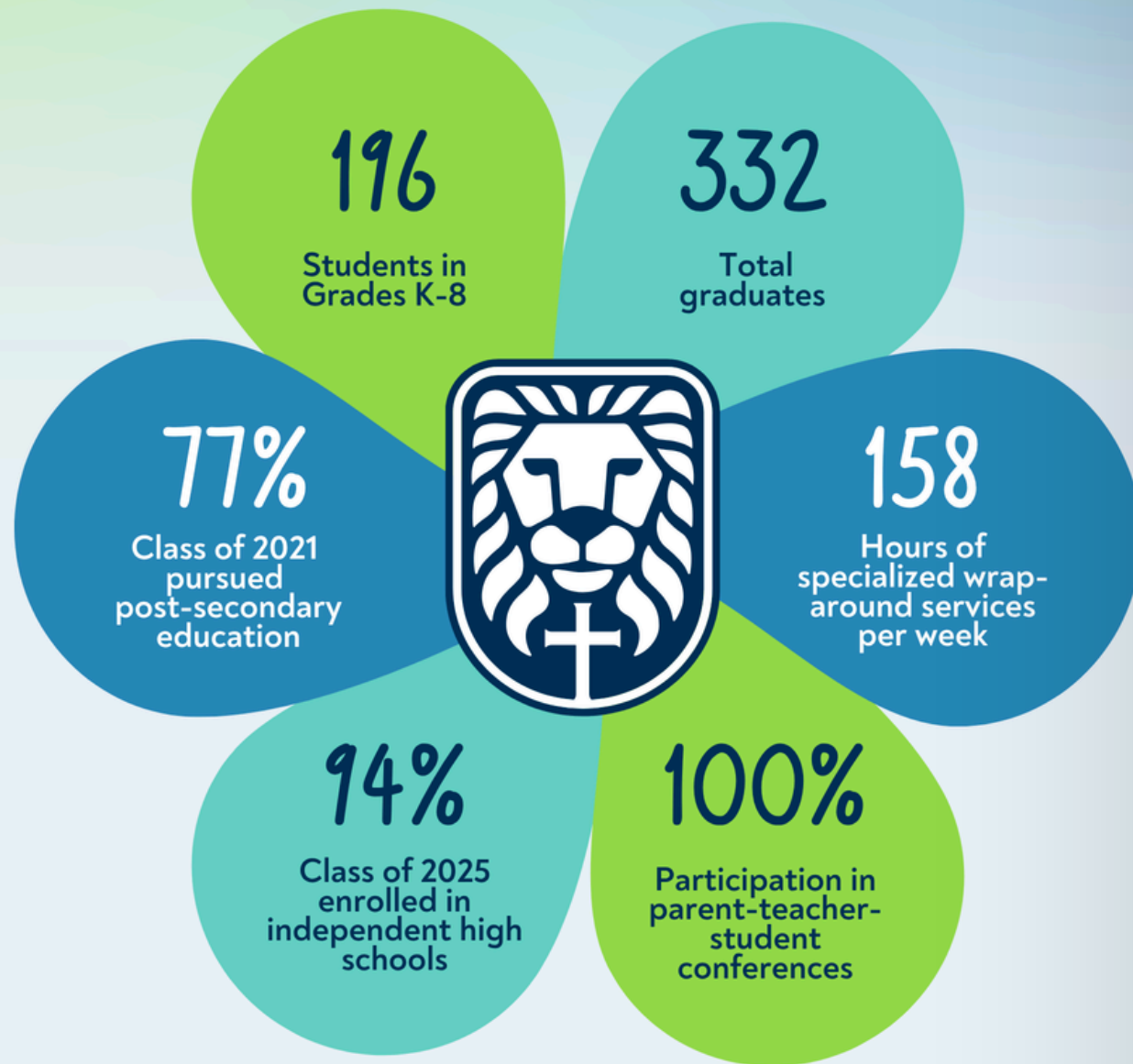
None of this work would be possible without the faithful and generous supporters who believe in what AJC is doing for its students and graduates, year after year. Thank you for walking with us, for trusting this community, and for helping ensure that the love found here truly can go anywhere it wants.

Sincerely,

M. Maruca
Michael Maruca
Head of School



AJC at a Glance



A Collective Century of Service

Honoring the staff who have been with AJC since the start

Walk our halls, and it's easy to see why people call Anna Julia Cooper School "a little slice of heaven on N 29th Street." There is a warmth here—a shared purpose, a community of affection that feels both real and rare. It's a reflection of our founding staff, whose service has shaped the heart and soul of AJC over the past 17 years, a remarkable **100 years of combined service**. Their commitment has been more than a career; it has been a calling, driven by a deep belief in the students of Richmond's East End.

Weekend sporting events, after-school activities, late-night phone calls, rides to and from school, a four-week summer program—their exceptional dedication has never been limited by the month of the year, day of the week, or time of day—and has always been rooted in love.



Mike Maruca, founding Head of School, wisely chose to work alongside people whose flexibility, dedication, and good humor could navigate the unknowns of a new school.



Katye Snipes, arriving as one of the first staff members, became a pastoring presence—administrator, nurse, problem-solver, and steady guide whose leadership set the school's rhythm. **Yolanda Gilliam**, AJC's Principal, began as a Math Teacher but quickly became the heart of the community—the self-proclaimed mother of the school.

Classrooms have been shaped by teachers whose expectations set the tone for learning and life. **Mereal Hughes** brings a calm strength and standards that challenge and uplift, and has inspired students to stretch and believe in themselves. **Brian Keiper** infuses humor and high expectations into the classroom, offering a relatable presence that has made students feel fully seen. **Steve McNamee** serves as a grounded educator, balancing firm guidance with a steadfast belief in every student's potential.



Linton "Coach" Wade, Dean of Students and Athletic Director, guides students with care and consistency—a father figure who has coached students on and off the court.

Laura McGowan, as Development Director, has expertly stewarded AJC's financial backbone and community of supporters while keeping students at the heart of her work.



Our Community of Affection

The culture at AJC is one of hope and belonging. It is the enduring sense of care and connection, built together over time, that sets AJC apart. This year, our community of affection was our largest yet, encompassing 196 students and their families, and 332 alumni—strengthened by volunteers who brought their time and hearts to our school and made possible by donors whose generosity sustains our work.

Our students are at the heart of our community of affection—an environment of care so present that they feel it from the moment they walk through our doors. Surrounded by adults who encourage and uplift them year after year, students grow in confidence and belonging. Over time, they begin to uplift one another as well, playing an important role in shaping our shared culture of kindness and connection.



This year, a growing number of activities helped strengthen these bonds. Students bonded through play and the shared excitement of trying something new, building confidence together as they climbed trees, rode bikes, and learned to swim. They connected across grade levels through programs like Reading Buddies, House competitions, and team sports (new this year were Girls Volleyball and Flag Football). This same spirit of care shone through our Beetles—students who help out around our buildings, sweeping and emptying trash while learning from our facilities team, who, like all staff, nurture our community of affection every day.

AJC brought so much brightness into my life. I created friendships with so many good people here. I've learned to give new people a chance.

*- Danaja E.
8th Grade*

It Takes a Village

Partnerships are essential to meeting our kids' needs, and empower students to discover new interests, grow in curiosity and confidence, and experience joy along the way. This year we partnered with more than a dozen non-profits and specialty organizations to provide enrichment opportunities and wrap-around supports, eliminating barriers our students would otherwise face.



All lower school students learn to swim through our partnership with **Swim RVA**.

Lower School students participate in weekly art classes through our non-profit partner, **Art for the Journey**.



Fourth grade students participate in **Minds In Motion**, a **Richmond Ballet** program that brings dance to students across the city.



Our friends from **Richmond Cycling Corps** in action; one of multiple partners, including **Blue Sky Fund** and **Scouts**, who aim to expand students' worlds through outdoor adventure.

Partnering for Literacy

Literacy is always at the forefront of our efforts as we prepare students for academic success. This year, a growing number of initiatives—Writing Wednesdays, the Greatest Writing Contest Ever, Read Hard Play Hard Days, and a library chock-full of high-quality books—aimed to connect with readers at every level.

Through our Title I Reading Program and growing partnerships with Talk Therapy and READ, LLC, we removed barriers to specialized literacy support—providing access to screenings and weekly one-on-one speech and reading intervention, engaging families through literacy events, and identifying early markers of previously undiagnosed dyslexia.

46
students received
Reading Intervention

15
students received
Speech Therapy

34
hours of services
provided each week



Leading with Heart and Resolve:

Honoring Jill Sivertsen Hunter

Strong schools are shaped by strong leadership, and Anna Julia Cooper School has been blessed with extraordinary stewardship at the board level since its inception. As we reflect on the 2024–2025 school year, we offer our deepest gratitude to **Jill Sivertsen Hunter**, who concluded her service as Board Chair on June 30, 2025, after eight years of visionary, faithful leadership. We also warmly welcomed **Fleet Wallace**, who has stepped into the role of Board Chair, building on a foundation Jill helped to lay.



Jill's tenure as Board Chair was marked by a blend of warmth and resolve. A tireless advocate for AJC, she spoke passionately about the school wherever she went—inviting friends, colleagues, and community members not just to hear about our mission, but to walk through our doors and experience it firsthand. **Her belief in AJC was contagious, and her personal outreach brought countless supporters into deeper relationship with the school.**



Yet for all her efforts around strategy, planning, and growth, Jill never lost sight of what mattered most: the students.

Jill's leadership coincided with a pivotal period in the school's history. Under her guidance, the Board shepherded the school through two comprehensive strategic planning processes that strengthened AJC's long-term vision and positioned us for transformational growth. She also helped guide the construction of both the Middle School and the new Lower School—ensuring that the school's physical growth remained deeply aligned with its mission.

Yet for all her efforts around strategy, planning, and growth, Jill never lost sight of what mattered most: the students. She spent time in classrooms with kids, built relationships with teachers and staff, and was a familiar, beloved presence on campus. **Through her leadership, Jill helped ensure that more children would be known, loved, and educated at AJC for generations to come.**



Middle School Chapel: Connection, Leadership, Service

Each Wednesday during the school year, students gather for chapel—a midweek pause to reflect, connect, and be reminded of who we are as a community. These shared experiences help us build habits of empathy and gratitude.

Our youngest students begin their day with positive affirmations in Lower School Chapel, while Middle School students close their day with a formal service complete with singing, scripture, and prayer.

The atmosphere in Middle School Chapel is always calm and soothing at the start, offering quiet moments to settle in. After the lesson, students share prayers for friends and family and are offered communion. Teachers conclude the service with “Shout-Outs,” recognizing students who have shown growth, grit, or kindness, with a lively round of applause following each acknowledgement.



The Reverend Becky McDaniel, Rector of Westover Episcopal Church, has guided Middle School Chapel since 2022, gently mentoring the Student Vestry and coordinating guest preachers from Episcopal churches across Richmond. This year’s visiting voices included Chaplain Allison Seay of St. Michael’s Episcopal School, Rev. Jabriel Hasan of Richmond Hill, Rev. Benjamin Badgett of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, Rev. Marlene Forrest of St. Philip’s Episcopal Church, and Rev. Rock Higgins of St. George’s Episcopal Church.

AJC staff also stepped forward to share their personal stories of struggle and resilience, offering students deeper insight into who they are and how their faith guides them through the joys and challenges of life.



A highlight of each Middle School Chapel is the Student Vestry, pictured here with Reverend Becky. Members of the student vestry take a leadership role in Chapel throughout the year. Actively participating by reading scripture, leading student prayers, and distributing communion, their leadership sets the tone for service.

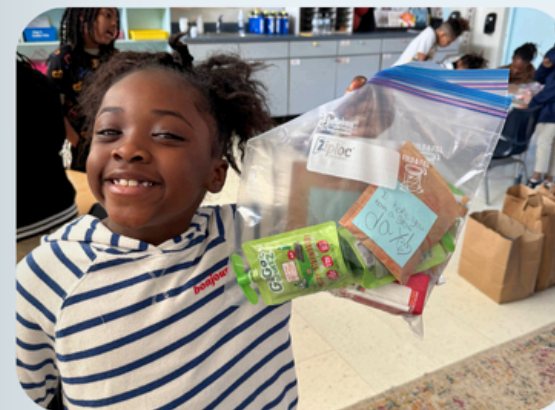


A Force for Good

Our namesake, Anna Julia Haywood Cooper, believed the best education shapes young people into forces for good in the world. In her essay “On Education,” she wrote:

“The best and most economical education is that which gives to the individual, according to his capacity, the training of 'head, hand, and heart,' or, more literally, of mind, body, and spirit, which transforms him into a beneficent force in the service of the world.”

Her wisdom reminds us of the importance of opportunities to experience the agency and joy of lending a helping hand. Several service projects empowered our students to serve and contribute to their community this year.



This year marked our **4th Annual Gordon Wallace Day of Giving**, honoring the memory and legacy of Gordon Wallace, Jr., our founding board chair, whose generosity helped bring AJC to life. Students in grades 5–8 completed projects that benefited both our school and the wider Richmond community—from volunteering at the SPCA to preparing meals for CARITAS, and leading neighborhood cleanups.

Moments of service also arose spontaneously. During the Richmond water crisis in January 2025, AJC staff quickly identified families in urgent need and delivered bottled water within hours. This inspired a school-wide recycling challenge, in which **students collected more than 2,000 bottles and learned that small actions can have a big impact.**

On **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**, we turned a day off into a “day on”—making scarves and snack bags for neighbors experiencing homelessness, crafting valentines for retirement home residents, and writing thank-you cards for firefighters.

Through each service opportunity, students became a force for good that reached far beyond the halls of AJC. They witnessed the impact they could make, recognized the strengths they already possess, and gained a deeper understanding of themselves and their community.

AJC Class of 2025

As they transitioned to high school, AJC alumni branched out across the city, guided by our Graduate Support Program and our partners at UPRVA. Our Class of 2025 now attend:

- Cristo Rey Richmond
- Rise Academy
- The Steward School
- St. Catherine's School
- St. Christopher's School
- Trinity Episcopal School
- Maggie Walker High School
- Armstrong High School
- John Marshall High School



AJC Class of 2021

The Class of 2021 has shown remarkable persistence and determination. With 92% graduating high school on time and 77% pursuing post-secondary education, our alumni show what's possible with hard work, self-confidence, and support from their community. We are grateful for the continued commitment of our Graduate Support Team and our partners at UPRVA, who have walked alongside them. Our Class of 2021 alumni now attend:

- Brightpoint Community College
- Chowan University
- Hollins University
- Howard University
- Loyola University (full ride!)
- Norfolk State University
- Old Dominion University
- Radford University
- St. Vincent College
- Virginia State University



*What I've learned is this:
Adversity doesn't define you –
your resilience, your strength,
your ability to stand up again –
That's what shapes you.
I am more than my trauma.
I am more than a demographic.
I am Rockira Harris.*

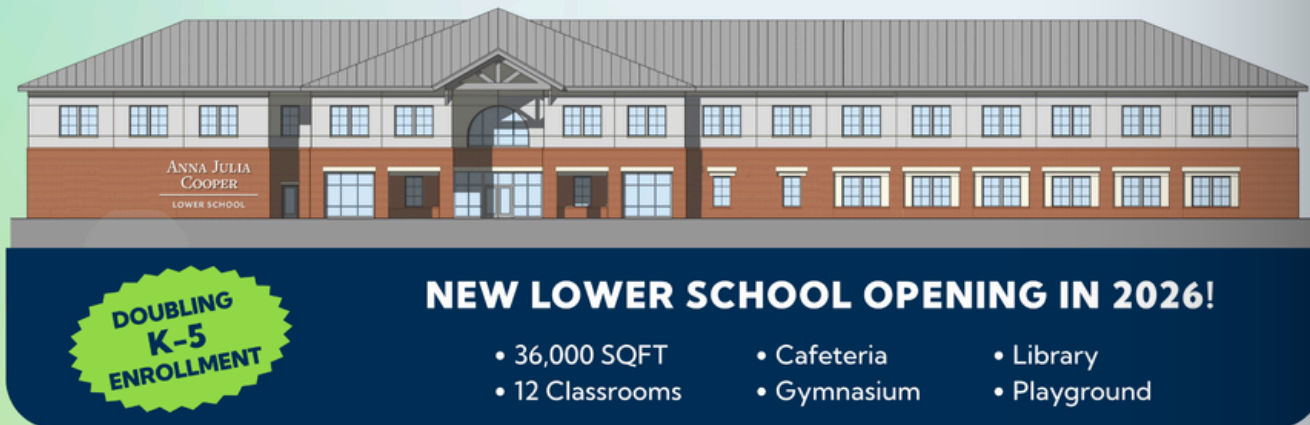
*- Rockira Harris,
Trinity Episcopal School graduate
and current Howard Bison*

Our Next Chapter: Hope Grows

In the spring of 2025, a new chapter began in the story of Anna Julia Cooper School. With shovels in hand and community leaders by our side, we broke ground on our new Lower School building—marking a major milestone in our Hope Grows Campaign.

Launched to expand our reach and deepen our impact, **Hope Grows** is a \$37 million campaign to build a new Lower School facility, expand our operating support, and grow our endowment. The centerpiece of this vision is a new Lower School building and athletic field, which will allow us to **double our capacity in grades K–5—adding over 80 new seats for young learners in our community. In the fall we enrolled a second section of Kindergarten, a glimpse of our growth to come.**

Our Lower School groundbreaking ceremony, held on site in late May, featured welcoming remarks from **Jill Hunter**, AJC Board Chair, followed by **Mike Maruca**, Head of School, who shared the vision and urgency behind our expansion.



We were honored to be joined by The Honorable Cynthia I. Newbille, Richmond City Council, who celebrated the impact of AJC on our community. We also heard from David Turner, Vice President of Operations at Kjellstrom and Lee, who spoke about the project’s significance and momentum. **Micheal Crane**, Principal of the Lower School, shared his gratitude for the community’s remarkable support with attendees. His remarks were followed by a musical performance from our 3rd grade class—the future leaders of the new Lower School and the anticipated first 5th grade graduates to walk its halls. Together, they participated in the ceremonial “turning of the soil.”

Construction is well underway, with plans to open the new building in summer 2026. Each step forward is powered by the generosity of our supporters. **We are deeply grateful to all who have invested in this vision. Because of you, hope truly grows at Anna Julia Cooper School.**





Financials

July 1st, 2024 - June 30th, 2025

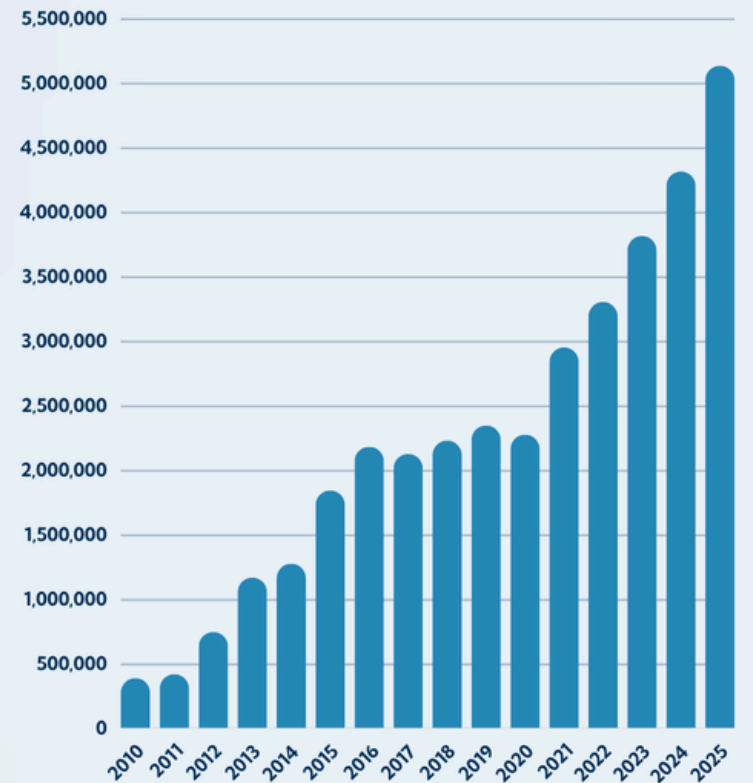
Revenue*

DONOR TYPE	AMOUNT
Individuals	\$2,212,899
Foundations	\$1,229,268
Corporations	\$105,010
Churches/Civic Support	\$143,742
Miscellaneous	\$427,130
Other Reimbursements	\$193,290
Other **	\$827,414
TOTAL	\$ 5,138,753

Expenses*

CATEGORY	AMOUNT
Program	\$3,854,389
Graduate Support	\$270,754
Management & General	\$614,144
Fundraising	\$399,466
TOTAL	\$5,138,753

Revenue Growth



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

** Includes \$827,414 from operational reserves, which offset annual expense increases due to the expansion.

2024-2025

Staff & Board



Leadership

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


Board of Directors

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

Faculty & Staff

KATE ABBOTT, Lower School Social Worker
INGRID ADDISON, Admissions
KIARA AUSTIN, Middle School Kitchen
TAQUISHA BELL, Outpatient Therapist
FLOYD BROWN, Maintenance Assistant
STEPHANIE CASSIDY, Lower School Classroom Aide
BRIDGETTE CRADDOCK, Facilities Manager
J'NIQUE CRADDOCK, Coordinator of Food Services
AMAYA DOSWELL, Lower School Title I Reading
MERIDYTH EVERETTE, 6th Grade English & History Teacher
AARON EVERIC, Library & IT
JENESSE EVERTSON, 1st Grade Teacher
THEO FRANKEL, Lower School Classroom Aide
EMILY FRITZ, 2nd Grade Teacher
CHRISTY GORE, 5th Grade Language Arts
TIM GRIMES, Lower School Classroom Aide
PAULA HARPER, Accounting Specialist
MEREAL HUGHES, 7th & 8th Grade Science Teacher
REBECCA HUGO, Lower School Classroom Aide
MARKAYA JAMES, Assistant Director Graduate Support
TAMARA JOHNSON, 3rd Grade Teacher
BRIAN KEIPER, 7th & 8th Grade History Teacher
MICHELLE LIGHTFOOT, Lower School Music Teacher
DANIEL MARTIN, 7th & 8th Grade Math Teacher
STEVE MCNAMEE, Middle School Intervention Teacher
SHANNON MOISE, Middle School Social Worker
KRISSE MORLEY, Grants Manager
KATERINA MOSS, Visual Communication Designer
ASHLEY RAGGI, Community Engagement Coordinator
KATHERINE REID, Donor Relations Coordinator
JULISA ROBINSON, Kindergarten Teacher
RAYMOND ROBINSON, Lower School Kitchen
JOHN SZYMENDERA, 5th Grade Teacher
QUINTIN TERRELL, PE and Middle School Music Teacher
MYRTLE THAXTON, 6th Grade Math & Science Teacher
SAM TREPP, Middle School English & History Teacher
STEPHANIE TURNER, Kindergarten Teacher
VICTORIA WEAN, 4th Grade Teacher
BROOKS WHITTEN, Lower School Classroom Aide

Love. Educate. Uplift.

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ANNA JULIA COOPER
SCHOOL

faith • knowledge • pride