



# ANNA JULIA COOPER

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## SCHOOL

2124 North 29th Street, Richmond, VA 23223  
(804) 822-6610 ● [ajcschool.org](http://ajcschool.org)

*faith • knowledge • pride*

September 9, 2024

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To Whom It May Concern:

On July 8<sup>th</sup> of this year, AJC kicked off its 16<sup>th</sup> year with our summer session, opening the doors to 198 students in grades K - 8. By all accounts it was the best summer session yet.

With Covid—knock on wood—in the rearview mirror, the overall morale and strength of the faculty and staff seemed as strong as ever. If there's such a thing as a secret ingredient, it is the folks on the ground who continue to do extraordinary work. Academic gains, particularly among our youngest students, have accelerated. 14 of 24 graduates from our class of 2020 matriculated to four-year colleges. All but a few of our 29 graduates in this year's 8<sup>th</sup> grade class are in independent schools for high school. We have put additional energies and resources into our curriculum and academic support services and we are seeing the fruits of that effort. And, as always, we have more than a few students who do not reach grade level. Which is to say, we cast a wide net.

This year we have added a second kindergarten, and the plan over the next five years is to expand by one section each year up to and through 5<sup>th</sup>. The sooner we start the better—there is less ground to make up and more time to get and keep students on grade level or beyond. Sports and extra-curriculars have expanded as well. This year we are making a significant investment in an instrumental music program for middle school students, something we have wanted to do almost since the day we opened our doors.

The heart and soul of AJC continues to be our ever-growing community of affection which we hope is palpable to anyone who walks through our doors. We believe it is transformative, primarily for the students we serve, but also for staff, volunteers, parents, and community partners who continue to remark on the uniqueness of the School. Sustaining that environment and culture—which only happens with great energy and intentionality, and not without a fair share of sacrifice and grit—is our core curriculum. Our mission is to 'love, educate, and uplift' our students and graduates, and in that very specific order.

The biggest news is that we are well down the road toward building a new lower school in which we will ultimately be able to serve an additional 100 students. An architect, project manager and contractor have all been at work for well over six months and we hope to break ground by early spring of next year. Spurred on by a surprise and very significant grant from a generous Foundation, we are busy at work raising money ourselves. Approximately half the money raised will go toward the building; the other half will be used to supplement the on-going annual costs which will only grow with each passing year. A significant safety net of reserves for this next period in the life of the School is absolutely critical.

We---our Board and administrative team---are sober about the financial situation of the School. We are still in good shape in 2024 and our base of support continues to grow. This year, however, we need to raise over \$4.5MM to cover our budget. As a tuition free school which relies entirely on the generosity of individual donors and foundations, this is a tall

order. To do that annually feels like a challenge on good days and daunting on others. But that is our commitment. There is no proverbial magic bullet and the vicissitudes of the larger economy are beyond our control. What we can control, however, is creating and recreating each day something beautiful but also exceptional here on 29<sup>th</sup> Street. The fact that we are an educational enterprise remains appealing to donors; that we serve who typically live on the margins brings added appeal; and that we are rooted and grounded in an expressed religious belief, namely that “Jesus is the fullest expression of God’s love for us,” makes for an even greater appeal for many.

We welcome support and we welcome visitors. If you’re reading this and have an inclination to come by and visit, please do so! We would love to see you.

Sincerely,

Michael Maruca  
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