



ANNA JULIA COOPER

SCHOOL

faith • knowledge • pride

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September 17, 2026

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To Whom It May Concern:

Year seventeen was one of the most eventful and significant in the life of Anna Julia Cooper School. Among all that transpired, four events stand out.

First, the Board of Directors hired Tommy Blain as the new Head of School succeeding the School's Founder, Mike Maruca. The decision was unanimous and enthusiastic. A thorough and national search ended with a homegrown candidate who attended the Collegiate School and the University of Virginia. Tommy's professional career in education began in the classroom as a kindergarten teacher. He was later the Head of a K – 8 KIPP School in Boston. Tommy quickly gained the support and affections of the staff, board, students and the wider AJC community. The transition was as seamless as one could hope.

Second, the School successfully completed its ambitious \$37MM Hope Grows campaign by June 30th, the end of the fiscal year. Among other things, it was an extraordinary testament to the belief our supporters have in the work of the School. Roughly half of the funds raised covered all the expenses—from site work and permits, to architect, project manager, bricks and mortar, and FFE—for a new lower school building. The other half will be used for operations going out a half dozen years or so and for the School's modest but growing endowment.

Third, on June 30th, we cut the ribbon on the new Lower School, just in time for our mandatory, four-week summer session which began on July 6th. Work was completed fully two months earlier than we had originally planned. It's a beautiful building, and the School owes a great debt of gratitude to Kjelstrom and Lee, the builder, as well as Katie Cherneau, the project manager. This building will enable AJC to eventually serve twice as many lower school students, with a second section of each grade, K – 5.

Fourth, for a modest price, the school was able to purchase the old lower school building from the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority. This was at the top of our devoutly-to-be-wished list for fifteen years. Originally built as a pre-school, the building will be returned to that purpose, becoming a daycare and pre-school for children aged 2 – 5. Another non-profit will run and pay for it. We believe that many of those children will matriculate into our kindergarten, increasing thereby our ability to fulfill our mission.

With the 18th year underway, the School is now serving 230 students with two sections in all grades except 4th and 5th. Those two sections will be added within the next two years.

Other items of note:

- New hires – between meeting the human resource needs that come with expansion, and some staff leaving for a variety of reasons, all of them good, we hired more new

staff than in any other year in the life of the School. Early indications are that this significant personnel growth is extremely positive.

- Athletic field – we have a new athletic field on a block adjacent to the school for football, soccer, flag football, and PE
- Accreditation – our ten-year VAIS accreditation will be this coming spring, and we are already doing some preliminary work in preparation for it
- Staffing – while one could always make a case for more staffing, we currently enjoy healthy staffing in nearly all areas of school life: academic remediation, social and emotional support, kitchen and maintenance, and our development/marketing offices
- Math – we have adopted a new, school-wide math curriculum and the early signs are that it's a welcome and positive change

Among the concerns which come to mind this year are the usual suspects:

- Can we relentlessly sustain 'the community of affection' which is the single most important ingredient in the life of the School, i.e. Do staff want to be here? Are they moved by the mission? Are they all healers as well as teachers? Is that sense of affection, expressed in "loving, educating, and uplifting our students and graduates," tangible to all who know us and enter our doors?
- If we continue to choose to serve so many students and families who come to us with enormous needs and challenges, can we be instrumental in making a difference in their lives?
- For several years now, we have known we cannot raise our annual budget, which, in a tuition-free school, is *de facto* the annual fund. Hence, (see above) the operations expenses built into the *Hope Grows* campaign. Still, it will be an annual challenge to raise the funds we need to not only operate but to thrive. The Board is fully aware of this challenge.
- Finally, we now have 330+ graduates and only two, full-time individuals in our Graduate Support Program. One of the goals for the coming year is to reassess just how much support we can reasonably provide to graduates, and what that will look like.

Finally, love remains our north star, and we believe that "Jesus is the fullest expression of God's love for us." Each day, we strive to practice that faith whether in chapel, the hallway, a classroom, or at the front door welcoming all who walk through it. On our best days, we believe it is that faith which best expresses who we are and why we are here.

Sincerely,

Tommy Blain
Head of School

Michael Maruca
Former Head of School