



# STRATEGIC PLAN

2019-2026



*Cumberland Academy*  
of GEORGIA  
An Exceptional School for Exceptional Students

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## Our Location



# PREAMBLE

Cumberland Academy of Georgia is a fully accredited private school specializing in the needs of children with Asperger's Syndrome, ADD, ADHD, high functioning autism, and learning disabilities. Cumberland's focus is on educating students 4th - 12th grade through a tailored curriculum which allows students to meet their individual goals in an environment with smaller class sizes, in-house counselors, and accommodations when needed. The Cumberland family embraces the uniqueness of every student by challenging them to reach their full potential. Our academic and social curriculum encourages the development of life skills essential in becoming independent and self-sufficient adults.

Debbi and Matthew Scarborough, founders of Cumberland Academy of Georgia, planted the campus roots in the dynamic city of Sandy Springs in Atlanta, Georgia in 2007. Now educating for over 12 years, Cumberland continues to remain a top 50 school in the nation for children with Autism.

Cumberland accepts Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (SB10) and provides need-based GOAL Scholarship funding. Cumberland Academy of Georgia is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) and from the Georgia Accrediting Commission (GAC). Cumberland Academy of Georgia is a member of the following organizations: Georgia Independent School Association (GISA), Atlanta Area Association of Independent Schools (AAAIS), and the Georgia Association of Private Schools for Exceptional Children (GAPSEC).

Cumberland's curriculum is tailor made to achieve reading, writing, mathematics and other core curricular goals contained in the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards. For those students needing additional academic challenges, a higher level curriculum is provided through Cumberland courses to include AP, online virtual class work, or dual enrollment in college courses. At Cumberland, we strive to successfully address the academic, social and emotional needs of each student. Full time counselors work with students to develop strategic coping methods. Students are encouraged to use their skills within peer relations and social situations. Cumberland encourages social and emotional growth through nurturing, innovative, and challenging programs.

The staff and faculty of Cumberland are proud of the progress, and recognize our need to grow in the areas of IT, facility management, and continued ever changing academics. Cumberland always wants to be learning innovative ideas with our academics and measure the progress of our population and evaluate our success to ensure our efficiency for teaching students with Autism and learning differences.



# MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY

## *Our Mission*

Cumberland Academy of Georgia specializes in the needs of children with high functioning Autism, Asperger's, ADD, ADHD and other learning differences. The mission of the academy is to provide a safe, supportive, educational environment in partnership with faculty, staff, students and parents. The Cumberland family embraces the uniqueness of every child by challenging and inspiring them to reach their full potential. Our academic and social curriculum encourages the development of life skills essential in becoming self-sufficient adults.

## *Philosophy*

Cumberland Academy of Georgia is dedicated to the belief that faculty, staff, students and parents are all involved in our children's education in a responsible, nurturing and supportive way. Each student is entitled to a safe, secure and healthy environment. We strive to create a warm and inviting atmosphere and to instill in our students a sense of self-worth. We teach beneficial life skills so that our students grow into confident, cooperative and productive members of society. Cumberland Academy of Georgia has developed and will continue to improve an exciting and challenging curriculum that recognizes the educational needs of each student. We respect the learning diversity of each student. This is done through cooperative learning and active hands-on techniques that are integrated into all subject areas along with co-curricular activities. This best practices curriculum infuses the creative arts as well as problem solving, social skills, critical thinking and decision making skills. The curriculum aims to develop and enhance abilities, giving appropriate guidance with realistic expectations. The curriculum promotes helping students develop strategies to cope with anger, stress and anxiety along with motivating them to assert themselves in a positive way while respecting others.



*Cumberland Academy*  
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# GOAL 1

## **Engage in strategic enrollment management to grow programs, optimize efficiency in student services, and ensure long-term financial viability of the institution.**

The ability of Cumberland Academy of Georgia to provide high-quality services to its students is a function of its enrollment. While a small setting allows the delivery of superior individualized services, it limits the number of students served, the resources available to meet the needs of this population, and long-term sustainability. It is critical that the school identify the optimal enrollment necessary to meet the demands of the future both within its current setting on Mt. Vernon Highway and potentially beyond.

### **Initiatives**

#### **1. Identify optimal enrollment at the Mt. Vernon facility that takes into account appropriate student-faculty ratios, classroom size, and financial needs of the institution.**

We will evaluate all aspects of our operations to determine the number of students that ideally can be served on our Mt. Vernon campus. Our students must have an environment that is suited to their unique learning needs, including comfortable classrooms, appropriate staffing levels, and space for extracurricular activities. At the same time, enrollment levels must be sufficient to provide financial support for the intense instruction and services that are provided in a small setting.

#### **2. Develop and implement a strategic plan for reaching optimal enrollment at Mt. Vernon campus within three academic years.**

We will develop and implement a plan to meet the target identified in Initiative #1 within three academic years. This will include a study of demand for services, marketing, and tuition pricing to ensure sustainable and energized growth moving forward.

#### **3. Evaluate the feasibility and desirability of relocating to a larger building or adding space/facilities beyond the Mt. Vernon campus.**

In the process of evaluating short-term optimal enrollment at the Mt. Vernon campus, we will also study the feasibility of adding to our operations over the long-term. This may include a move to a single larger facility or operating across multiple campus locations. We will identify where demand for unmet services exists, what real estate may best serve our student needs and the financial feasibility of expanding operations.





# GOAL 2

**Be a national leader in preparing our students for success by infusing our curriculum with innovative teaching and experiential learning that is tailored to our students' unique needs.**

Cumberland Academy of Georgia is already known as a leader in providing education to students with autism, ADHD, and other learning differences. We will grow this reputation by adopting best-practices for our student population to ensure success both within the classroom and after graduation.

## Initiatives

**1. Educate teachers on best-practices in using MAP data and other norm-referenced tests to track and advance student learning.**

We will provide teachers with the methods, encouragement and support structure necessary to use norm-referenced tools successfully for the benefit of our students. We will use this knowledge to individualize our instruction for each student and track student achievement over time.

**2. Provide a program of instruction for students to strengthen their executive function capabilities.**

We will build on the portions of our curriculum designed to enhance students' executive function ability. This is an area of weakness for many in our population that is critical to academic and post-graduation success.

**3. Develop a comprehensive plan to attract and retain outstanding teachers who are skilled in serving our student population.**

Our students need innovative teachers who are highly qualified and continuously engaged in learning. We will ensure that our compensation, benefits, and working environment are attractive to talented teachers. We will provide ongoing opportunities for professional development across their careers, engage in discussions on best practices, provide resources for excellent teaching, and encourage ongoing evaluation and development of teaching skills.



# GOAL 2

## Initiatives

### **4. Create a plan and schedule for teacher collaboration and observations.**

To strengthen the teaching abilities of all staff, teachers new to Cumberland Academy of Georgia will be assigned teachers to observe at least once a semester. After observations, teachers will meet to discuss what was observed and brainstorm how to incorporate ideas observed into their own teaching. Experienced teachers will be encouraged to observe their partners later in the semester to encourage greater collaboration.

### **5. Create a folder in Google Drive with shared access for all faculty that includes exemplar lesson plans.**

We will create a resource for teachers to assist them in creating quality curriculum. This may include information originating from professional development classes or successful lessons created by individual teachers and will provide relevant information on both curriculum scope and sequence, e.g., books read in literature class, props employed in disseminating the information, major projects completed over the year.

### **6. Employ technology that is effective and meets the safety needs of students.**

Technology is everywhere in our curriculum and in the world. Students must be conversant in its use while at the same time restricted from engaging in an undesirable activity. We will develop and implement policies and procedures to ensure that both objectives are met. Moreover, we will explore and invest in technology to ensure that teachers have access to effective tools and services that meet their instructional needs.

### **7. Expand opportunities for all students to engage in real-world opportunities to enhance skill development and career readiness**

We will become an industry leader in preparing students for success in leading productive, independent lives after graduation. We will infuse our curriculum with training in social and life skills and provide exposure to career and college opportunities to assist students in planning for life after graduation.



# GOAL 3

Enhance curriculum by evaluating existing, and implementing new, experiential learning opportunities to strengthen our program's effectiveness for current students and graduates.

## Initiatives

- 1. Cumberland Academy of Georgia staff will focus on identifying meaningful off-campus experiences that encourage hands-on learning experiences across all grade levels.**

We are fortunate that the Atlanta community is interested in our work and eager to assist our students. We will continue to build relationships with companies to maximize opportunities for students as well as enhance academic curriculum.

- 2. Solicit local businesses, charities, religious organizations, and/or municipal organizations to create a Career Exploration seminar each semester.**

Faculty will be engaged in bringing the community into the classroom. At least six speakers will engage in meaningful discussions with small groups of 8th grade and above students.

- 3. Routinely review security programs to identify areas of concern related to student creativity in circumnavigating security systems.**

Faculty will create school-wide technology policies that can be uniformly enforced in all settings.





# GOAL 3

Enhance curriculum by evaluating existing, and implementing new, experiential learning opportunities to strengthen our program's effectiveness for current students and graduates.

## Initiatives

4. Create a plan to evaluate hardware, software, and application needs routinely throughout the school year.

5. Analyze teacher use of online programs and educational memberships throughout the school year and previous years to determine which subscriptions should be continued for greatest student enrichment.



# GOAL 4

**Establish sustainable programs to provide financial support to students who cannot otherwise afford the costs of attendance.**

Financial need should not disqualify capable students who would like to attend Cumberland Academy of Georgia. Our goal is to establish a set of funding programs and policies so that no child is turned away from Cumberland because of financial limitations.

## Initiatives

**1. Cultivate funding to enable the establishment of an endowment fund to support deserving students with financial need.**

We will initiate a campaign to fund an endowment for scholarships through donations, grants, and other community support. We will carefully research the best format, structure, and oversight of this fund to ensure its longevity.

**2. Increase the number of parents and employers who participate in the GOAL Program to increase the number of scholarships awarded.**

It is critical that we continue to maximize dollars received for student scholarships through the state of Georgia. We will enhance our communication efforts about the value of GOAL to ensure maximum participation by the Cumberland community.

**3. Explore the development of a “Sponsor-a-Child” (individual-to-individual) scholarship fund to assist students in the short-term.**

Although an endowment provides a stable source of ongoing support, it will not assist students with immediate needs. We will explore the creation of a fund that pairs donors with specific students to provide emergency tuition support.



# GOAL 4

Establish sustainable programs to provide financial support to students who cannot otherwise afford the costs of attendance.

## Initiatives

### 4. Develop specific criteria for families to qualify for tuition assistance.

It is critical that we provide all available funding for students in a way that is both equitable and consistent. We will establish a set of policies and procedures to ensure that this occurs and communicate these policies to our community.

### 5. Develop an annual campaign for the annual fund that encompasses all giving levels and achieves 100% giving from staff and families of students.



# GOAL 5

**Establish Cumberland as an industry leader in preparing special needs students for successful independent lives.**

## Initiatives

**1. Develop a multifaceted program for Cumberland students that guides and prepares students for life post graduation.**

While preparing socially for independent life, students will develop test taking skills and executive functioning skills for academic success. ACT preparation and testing are an integral part of the college search process. Career bound students will be assessed for career interests and work experience in the desired field will begin early in high school.

**2. Develop an alumni base and corporate partners to develop internships or any career related positions.**

Pre and Postgraduate students in college or career will be supported through work, volunteer or internship opportunities. Alumni will be encouraged to support and give back to current students through student seminars and mentoring programs.

**3. Develop an alumni base with information on success and challenges.**

Maintaining adequate information on what works with our students, where they are in college or career and successful support is paramount to the development of the initiative. We will send information quarterly to alumni regarding events, employment and work opportunities.

**4. Offer educational programming to parents and the broader community to facilitate effective support for our student population and engage our constituencies.**

As experts in the needs of our students, we will educate parents and those in the community through seminars and workshops relating to important issues relating to our student population. We will have a particular focus on the needs of our students post-graduation and the transition to independence. This will include state and government services to assist students and families in the mutual goal of independence.



# Appendix : Metrics

## Goal 1

By 2023 within the current building location, Cumberland Academy of Georgia will have reached the optimal level of student enrollment which provides comfortable classrooms, appropriate staffing levels and sufficient financial support for future sustainability.

## Goal 2

As a well respected special needs school, Cumberland Academy of Georgia needs to continue to use best-practices for our student population, hire and retain quality teachers, support our students with courses in executive functioning, and expand opportunities for all students to engage in real-world opportunities to enhance skill development and career readiness.

## Goal 3

As our enrollment increases and diversifies, Cumberland Academy of Georgia's faculty will need to provide quality instruction across all grade levels and subjects to ensure maximum acquisition of academic skills. Beyond academics, our staff will need to prepare students for future work experiences and living independently as young adults. This aspiration will require consistent collaboration and communication with colleagues, administrators, and our surrounding community.

## Goal 4

10 years ago the rate of Autism was 1 in 125 students. This year the projection is 1 in 59. As the rate of Autism increases, children diagnosed with a special need often come from families without means. Therefore as the need for a special school like Cumberland increases, there is need for additional financial assistance.

## Goal 5

Many reports have surfaced on the struggle for employers to find employees suitable for today's workplace. Also noted is the struggle for individuals with special needs to maintain employment. Our goal is to provide Cumberland students with the tools necessary to succeed in the workplace or college and to monitor students and assist when necessary. This requires continual monitoring of alumni.





# Our Committee



Debbi Scarborough, Founder/Headmaster has been actively involved with all aspects of the school since inception 12 years ago. As an advocate for children with disabilities, she continues to share her expertise with the community and stakeholders.



Cathi Arora is the Executive Director of the Sandy Springs Tennis Association. She has over 25 years of experience in communications, public affairs and fundraising. Ms. Arora holds a BS in journalism from Ohio University and a MPA from the College of Charleston. Her son, Shale, is a recent Cumberland graduate and is currently attending Beacon College.



Terri Brooks comes to Cumberland with over 40 years of experience in education. She has been with a variety of institutions from Georgia Tech, to The Walker School, to Brandon Hall. Of those years, more than 12 have been in admissions. She is well known by those in the disabilities professions in the metro area and well positioned to market and represent Cumberland.



Stuart Downs has a Bachelor of Arts from Dartmouth College and has been teaching mathematics for 13 years. In prior lives he has been a test prep tutor, bookkeeper for a non-profit, real estate site inspector and ultimate frisbee coach at the University of Georgia. Mr. Downs resides in Decatur with his twin children.



Wendy Hensel, associate dean for research and faculty development and professor of law at Georgia State University, teaches and writes about disability discrimination in American society and its intersection with education, employment and tort law.



Howard Jetmundsen has over 30 years of experience in business development and systems engineering for large commercial and military communications systems. He holds degrees in engineering from Vanderbilt and Georgia Tech. He was previously the chairman of the board for Rainbow Village, a transitional housing program in Duluth Georgia, and he currently assists the Boy Scouts of America in the Atlanta area with fundraising and program development.

# Our Committee



Valerie Laura, CFO received her bachelors of science in accounting from Western Kentucky University and has worked in the accounting and finance field for over 22 years. She helped start Cumberland Academy of Georgia in 2007 by establishing its non-profit status and its accreditation with SACS-CASI and GAC. She is responsible for all financial and fiscal aspects of Cumberland. She also provides business planning, accounting and budgeting efforts.



Doug Long has over 30 years experience as an educator and administrator in schools with grades Kindergarten through 12. He has worked with special needs students in all of these settings. He has served on several school improvement teams, as well as SACS accreditation teams. He is a veteran referee for youth league and high school soccer and football.



Laurie Mensing has over 20 years of classroom experience ranging from Kindergarten to High School teacher for children and young adults on the Autism Spectrum Disorder. For over 10 years she has worked at Cumberland Academy of Georgia teaching middle school students. She has her Bachelor of Science and Masters of Education in Special Education from the University of Georgia and her Specialist in Curriculum and Instruction from Piedmont College.



James Ramseur is a Senior Partner and Land Broker with Lee & Associates in Atlanta. He has served on the Board of Cumberland for 5 years. Jim is an active member on Cumberland's Search, Marketing, and Governance Committees.



Val Schwan, licensed professional counselor and director of counseling services, teaches a course on career and college readiness and facilitates social skill groups at Cumberland. She also provides individual counseling to students and their families.



Shari Freas Wright, Director of Student Advancement, is in her 7th year at Cumberland and has worked at various positions in the administrative side of Cumberland. She currently serves as the liaison between community and corporate business partnerships as well as the student advisor for college and career. She is the chairperson for the largest annual fundraiser for Cumberland and works with the search and fundraising board committees.