Higher Excellence

A Strategic Vision for
Convent of the Sacred Heart
2017-2022
Those who have to educate them to something higher must themselves have an idea of what they want; they must believe in the possibility of every mind and character to be lifted up to something better than it has already attained; they must themselves be striving for some higher excellence, and must believe and care deeply for the things they teach.

....let us not rest on our beautiful past.

—Janet Erskine Stuart
Introduction

In the mere 16 years since the dawn of the new millennium, Convent of the Sacred Heart has realized unprecedented growth and success. Since 2000, the school’s operating budget has tripled; its endowment has quadrupled; its campus has grown by over 50%; its faculty and staff have increased by nearly 30%; and it has added entirely new departments and fields of study, including engineering, computer science, Mandarin and wellness, all while keeping tuition in the middle range of its peer schools and increasing enrollment by only 11%.

From the development and implementation of dozens of new classes and programs to the massive expansion of the school’s physical plant, from national media attention for its innovative S.T.E.M. program of creating prosthetic hands for children in need to awards and honors too countless to list, at no time in history has the school been as forward-thinking, ambitious and successful.

But as one of our pioneering leaders, Janet Erskine Stuart, stated over 100 years ago, “let us not rest on our beautiful past.”

The following document represents over a year’s work of group meetings with students, parents, alumnae, and faculty and staff, as well as multiple surveys and many hours of committee deliberation and board discussion. As you read the school’s plans for the next five years, know that the framework that drives it all is the Goals & Criteria, along with the reaffirmation of our spiritual, Catholic heritage and our community’s desire for “higher excellence.”

We began the process of creating this plan by looking at the school and all of its functions through the lenses of Critical Analysis, Creativity, Leadership and Ethical Judgment. This is how we teach the students to address a challenge, and this is how we approached the process of analyzing the ideas, recommendations and needs you presented to us that ultimately made it into the plan before you. As the next pages illustrate, to achieve this “higher excellence,” we will continue to heavily invest in every asset of our school, from our facilities and classrooms to our faculty and staff to our programs and endowment.

We are thrilled to share our community’s focus for the next five years in the following sections. As we enter this exciting time, we honor and reaffirm the previous strategic planning committee’s vision as the one that continues to drive us today: “We seek to support our students as they build the intellectual and spiritual foundation necessary to living out the Mission of Sacred Heart education as they pursue their dreams, aspirations and commitments, with integrity, wherever those dreams, aspirations and commitments may be and wherever our students may need to go to pursue them.”
I. Strengthening a Firm Foundation

Mission  Finances  Facilities

The foundation on which any organization stands is critical to its success. At Sacred Heart, we are blessed to have a mission that has been developed over two centuries and is repeatedly praised for its breadth and used as a model for other organizations. Likewise, our facilities are marveled at for their beauty and ability to inspire. Our most recent addition, the Sacred Heart Athletics and Wellness Center, is the largest and most advanced athletics facility of any independent school in Manhattan, and is being used as a model for other schools. Similarly, with ongoing full enrollment, a generous community, and world-class financial leadership on the Board of Trustees, the school’s finances have never been stronger.

Being in such a wonderful foundational situation in these areas makes this an opportune time to revisit and strengthen our position.

We will strengthen our position in the following ways:

- Reaffirm our commitment as a Sacred Heart school devoted to its mission through the year-long Sacred Heart Commission on Goals (SHCOG) evaluation and accreditation process
- Celebrate our rich history by joining network schools in a year-long Bicentennial of Sacred Heart education coming to North America (2017-18)
- Address the next phase of long-term priorities for the school’s physical learning environment by building a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Center
- Implement financial planning for the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Center, establish goals and begin fundraising
- Address long-term financial goals, affordability and accessibility; explore ways to slow tuition increases, continue to control costs, and determine the right level of future financial aid
- Increase the school’s endowment for financial aid and faculty enrichment
- Create new programming (e.g. summer, after school, weekend) to expand offerings to both the internal and the external community that will increase revenue
- Maintain a forward-thinking and robust capital maintenance schedule that will ensure responsible stewardship of our landmarked campus buildings by maintaining their historic integrity in the context of necessary upgrades to the learning environment
In order to accomplish these goals we will do the following:

- Develop a forward-thinking Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (S.T.E.M.) curriculum that builds on the strength of the school’s current program across all grades and divisions, and that supports a growing interest in these disciplines
- Support curricular advances in S.T.E.M. by constructing state-of-the-art classrooms and labs
- Integrate the school’s Advanced Art program with S.T.E.M; known for producing exceptional artists, both performance and visual, the Art Department will work closely with the S.T.E.M. departments to enhance the interconnectedness of their disciplines
- Sustain and enhance the transformative vision of the Athletics and Wellness Center and review the content, timing and delivery of the P.E. curriculum in light of both academic demands and the wealth of opportunity and innovation afforded by the Athletics and Wellness Center
- Initiate a signature cross-disciplinary assignment that progressively builds over the years and serves as a culminating academic and intellectual experience; the intent of this “Capstone Program” is to lead students to discover their unique gifts and integrate the five Goals into a cohesive view that will support and serve each student as she moves into college life and beyond
- Prepare and counsel each Upper School student through her individual course selection, standardized test preparation and college admissions process to maximize her potential at gaining admittance into the college of her choice
- Establish criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the college counseling process with respect to each student and the process itself over time
- Increase awareness of Sacred Heart’s academically rigorous program and well-rounded student body by increasing marketing and personal communication to colleges and universities
- Review current academic schedules with the goal of implementing a revised daily schedule that best meets the academic needs of students in all divisions
- Continue the practice of thoroughly reviewing one academic department each year

II. Striving for Higher Academic Excellence

**Science & Technology   Art   Wellness**

**Capstone Program   Testing & College Placement**

**Scheduling   Assessment**

The hallmarks of a superior academic institution are its programs and effectiveness in preparing its students to change the world for the better. Institutions such as Sacred Heart, which are educating the leaders of tomorrow, must go a step farther. While remaining grounded in classical and time-honored educational modalities, Sacred Heart must be constantly looking to the future and enhancing its curriculum and offerings to reflect an ever-changing and more complex world; we must constantly strive for higher academic excellence.

Our current kindergarten students will graduate in 2029, and while we cannot know exactly what the world will look like then, our goal is to equip them with the tools to help them thrive in any situation. Critical to this goal is educating them to mastery of four major competencies: Analytical Skills, Creativity, Leadership and Ethical Judgment.
III. Affirming Our Place in the Global Society

Foreign Exchange  NYC Classroom  Environmental Stewardship  God’s Love  Service

As part of an internationally recognized and respected network of schools, Sacred Heart occupies a unique place in our world. With schools on nearly every continent, and as one of the oldest educational systems created for women still in existence, Sacred Heart as a collaborative entity is an educational pioneer. With unparalleled international resources, Sacred Heart looks to reaffirm and expand the opportunities available to its students through experiential learning in the world, while expanding its influence and its ability to do good works through service. Similarly, our community is located in one of the most advanced and diverse cities in the world, and we need to take advantage of both the educational and service opportunities it provides for our students, all while finding ways to be leaders in the protection of our earth’s resources through environmental stewardship.

To achieve these goals we will do the following:

- Form a task force of administrators and faculty to examine the quality and reach of the school’s exchange program’s national and global opportunities; expand the program, if valuable, based on the task force’s findings and recommendations
- Reaffirm and expand our use of New York City as a classroom extension via field trips and internships
- Renew our commitment to an already strong service learning program, now enhanced by our expanded campus
- Increase the school’s attention to ecological concerns, practicing mindful use of resources and increased conservation efforts, especially energy efficiencies in our physical plant
- Affirm our rich history of excellence in Sacred Heart education and the way in which it inspires students to bring their individual and personal expression of God’s love into the world
- Incorporate programs to promote inclusivity and cultural competencies among all constituencies
IV. Investing in People

Attract/Retain Faculty  Inclusivity  Information Systems  Communication

In order to strengthen Sacred Heart’s focus on investing in people, we will do the following:

- Continue to attract and retain excellent faculty and staff who are drawn to the visionary mission of Sacred Heart education and its traditions of excellence, whole child development and community
- Remain competitive within our peer group in the area of salaries and benefits offered to employees, as well as professional development opportunities; engage in annual assessment of the competitive standing of Sacred Heart’s compensation package and strategies for sustaining increases
- Research and implement an improved database system to minimize overlap, improve the scheduling process and increase administrative efficiency
- Continue to build and devote resources to the Awareness and Heritage & Spirituality Councils so that our community continues to strive for inclusivity and expand its openness and respect for difference in all areas of the school and with all constituencies
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current internal communications and implement branding and marketing strategies through new platforms, as appropriate, including social media
- Increase both external and internal communications about school-based programs, initiatives and accomplishments

At the core of Sacred Heart’s progress and many successes are the people who make up this unique community. In addition to the vast array of educational and programmatic offerings that benefit students, there are a great number of activities, events and opportunities for the rest of our community, including our faculty and staff, our alumnae, our parents and our friends. We are fortified by our unity and our goal of offering the best education we can to our students, and that is done through strengthening people and communication.
Our Process

This Strategic Plan includes ideas, analysis and recommendations generated through the following sources and activities:

- The Board of Trustees formed a Strategic Planning Committee in the Fall of 2014. This Committee directed the process of collecting data and ideas from the major constituencies of our community, and led strategic planning sessions with the full Board in the Spring of 2015 and 2016, as well as devoting major portions of other Board and Sub-committee meetings to this plan.

- Alumnae, parents and students were surveyed regarding their experiences with our community.

- Faculty and staff engaged in a semester of discussions on the topics that emerged from the community surveys.

- The administration oversaw the collection of data about student academic performance over the last five years, and also assessed the students’ spiritual and emotional growth over that time period.

- The Plant & Technology Committee of the Board and the administration engaged architects and engineers to conduct a comprehensive review of the physical plant and infrastructure at the main campus.

- The Finance and Strategic Planning Committees of the Board reviewed and updated the school’s overall financial model, focusing particularly on the costs of operations at the new 406 campus as well as exploring affordability and financial aid options for the future as inflation and costs at all educational institutions continue to increase. The committees conducted an extensive study, collected data and modeled various financial scenarios to help guide the Board in the discussion and planning in these ongoing areas.

- The Strategic Planning Committee incorporated into the report recommendations from the school’s last New York State Association of Independent Schools (NYSAIS) accreditation visit and the last Sacred Heart Commission on Goals (SHC0G) assessment.