

APPROVED BY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MARCH 23, 2009

Green Acres School

Strategic Plan

2008-2013

Green Acres School Mission

Green Acres is a coeducational, progressive school for grades pre-kindergarten through eight, dedicated to fostering the natural curiosity of students, engaging them actively in the joy of learning and facilitating problem solving. Based on an understanding of child development, Green Acres' program is cognitively, physically and creatively challenging. Valuing acceptance of a variety of viewpoints, this community promotes socioeconomic and cultural diversity. An environment of trust, cooperation and mutual respect encourages students to become increasingly independent thinkers and responsible contributors to an ever-changing, multicultural world.

Strategic Vision

Green Acres School is in an enviable position on the eve of its 75th Anniversary. Founded in 1934 on a set of progressive educational principles, the School continues both to adhere to and to build upon its philosophical foundation. This foundation is particularly vital at a time when student-centered, constructivist teaching methodology is considered "best practice," and when a culture of standardized testing within the public schools has made Green Acres an even more attractive alternative. What Green Acres School offers students and families has never been more needed or more relevant. The School currently enjoys additional markers of success, such as the retention of talented staff, committed trustees, a highly engaged parent body, more robust student enrollment, and alumni who demonstrate a high level of loyalty to the Green Acres community. Recent years have also brought the completion of a facility which not only meets the needs of the community but also reflects our deeply held values about how children best learn. The campaign to develop the facilities also demonstrates Green Acres' ever-growing culture of philanthropy and the satisfaction of its various constituents. Increasingly focused marketing of the school, using the concept of the "Intentional Model of Progressive Education," both in print and on the School's website, has led to greater clarity of what we do and why. This year's successful AIMS accreditation is yet another testament to the quality of Green Acres, both as an educational program and as sustainable institution.

The Strategic Vision for the next five years calls on the Green Acres' community to build upon these strengths. In the next five years, we envision:

- Progressive educational practices that are consistently and expertly implemented in classrooms and where these concepts are well understood by all Green Acres' constituents. We believe that Green Acres is poised to be a leader within both the National Progressive Educators' Network and the National Center for Independent School Renewal.
- A curriculum that is clearly and systematically delineated within and across each subject area and grade level.
- A School that is no longer a "well kept secret" in the Washington metropolitan area. Green Acres, through ongoing programmatic improvement and intensified marketing of our Intentional Model of Progressive Education, is viewed as a visible, high quality alternative to neighboring independent and public schools. Green Acres School will be well known and well considered locally.
- A School that is fiscally sound and sustainable, particularly in light of the downturn in the economy and in student demographics. This includes improved annual giving, a larger endowment, an expansion of non-tuition sources of revenue, improved staff compensation, and thoughtful long range financial planning to guide budgetary decision-making.
- A School that continues to deepen its commitment to all forms of diversity, both in terms of the educational program and the community overall. Attention to socio-economic diversity will be reflected in Green Acres' financial decision-making, and, in particular, in its allocation of financial aid resources.
- A visible, communicative Board of Trustees that demonstrates strategic decision making and increased clarity about its role and that of its committees. Board efforts will reflect "best practices" in the field.

Program and Curriculum

Vision: *A program which fully reflects the School's commitment to progressive educational practices. The School will have a clearly defined and well implemented curriculum, and it will maintain the necessary student support services to best meet all enrolled students' needs. Green Acres' program will be seen as a leader among Pre-K to Grade 8 schools locally and among progressive schools nationally.*

Challenges:

- Maintaining consistency and coherence of implementation of progressive educational principles across all grades and subject areas.
- Refining the curriculum to link subject areas within grades effectively and to develop systematically from grade to grade.
- Offering sufficient, responsive support services to meet the variety of students' needs.

Objectives:

- Build a strong, comprehensive curriculum that reflects current research and best teaching practices.
- Further coordinate the curriculum, so that the content and skills taught are well defined and coherent both within and across grade levels, teams, and subject areas.
- Further define and expand student support services available to meet the needs of all learners.

Rationale:

- A curriculum that is both rich in interdisciplinary connections and cohesive in terms of scope and sequence offers a strengthened program for students.
- Offering a program that meets the developmental and academic needs of all students is paramount toward achieving our School's mission.

Strategies:

A. Implementation of Progressive Educational Program

- Examine the consistency and coherence of the implementation of progressive educational principles throughout the program.
- Expand professional development experiences for teachers, with principles and practices of progressive education as a core feature. (See Personnel Section)

B. Coordination of the Curriculum from Pre-K to Grade 8

- Examine the curriculum for depth of understanding of content, progression of skills, and demonstration of mastery by students.
- Further develop curriculum maps that accurately and comprehensively reflect the program and that serve as an effective vehicle for curriculum development, analysis, and revision.
- Use curriculum maps to conduct a detailed analysis of the curriculum, from Pre-K to Grade 8.
- Pursue more opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration.

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- Allocate additional time in faculty meetings within and across divisions to discuss curricular issues and initiatives.
- Examine the progression of work habits and social skill development from grade to grade and across divisions.
- Investigate ways for teachers in adjacent grades to meet regularly and review skills and content currently taught. Pay particular attention to the links between ECU and the Primary Unit, as well as Grades 4 and 5.
- Consider all transitions when further coordinating the curriculum. (i.e. Lower School students entering Middle School, new students, students graduating to secondary schools).
- Develop and implement a school-wide technology curriculum.
- Develop and implement a school-wide curriculum of diversity topics to be taught at each grade level.

C. Broadening of Student Support Services

- Examine the roles and time allocated to the Learning Specialist and Counselor positions within both divisions of the School.
- Consider adding a learning specialist position for grades Pre-K to 2.
- Evaluate the materials and personnel available to support differentiated instruction across all grades and subject areas.
- Consider scheduling to see if it would be possible for a School Counselor to be present at all (or at least a portion of all) grade-level team meetings where individual students' emotional health and well-being are likely to be discussed.
- Review the ways in which student concerns are raised, communicated, tracked, and handled. Consider whether or not enough is being done at all levels to document students' social and emotional development. Allocate additional time for teachers on each team to discuss student progress.
- Consider the further use of standardized diagnostic assessments, particularly in Lower School language arts.
- Consider ways in which Extended Day staff can provide increased academic support for students.

D. Focusing on Student Behavior

- Establish and implement consistent all-School behavioral expectations.
- Review current research on progressive classroom management with an eye towards minimizing behavioral distractions and allowing for optimal learning conditions.

E. Parent Communication and Outreach

- Continue to develop programs that are sensitive to the needs of working parents.
- Consider the timing of parent meetings.
- Consider possible expansion of Extended Day coverage.

Marketing and Community Relations

Vision: *A clearly articulated and consistently applied marketing approach that promotes the School as a local and national leader among progressive schools. A stronger, more positive relationship between the School and its Luxmanor neighbors.*

Challenges:

- Fostering improved working relationships within the neighboring community.
- Clearly articulating the Green Acres mission, other messages, and outcomes to our community (internal and external) in a manner that reflects our core progressive values.
- Clearly communicating *how* Green Acres is different from other schools, and, importantly, *why* it is different.
- Understanding both the needs of our target market and the factors that attract and retain families.
- Understanding and adapting to demographic changes in our area.

Objectives:

- Improve communications and community relations, both internally and externally.
- Develop and implement a marketing growth plan that addresses strategies identified below and explores other opportunities for the School.
- Implement communication strategies and programs to increase our visibility and to inform the community about progressive education values and the “Intentional Model.”
- Develop and implement communication and outreach strategies to support consistent full enrollment and minimize attrition.
- Understand the needs of our target markets and adapt to demographic changes in our area.

Rationale:

- Outstanding working relationships and communications with both the internal and external Green Acres’ communities are critical to the School’s sustainability.
- By continually communicating about progressive education values, Green Acres’ expertise, and outcomes, the School will seize its niche as a leader in progressive education.
- Communication strategies and innovative programs will help maximize enrollment and minimize attrition.
- Strong communication and a robust, progressive educational program will position the School well in a challenging economic and demographic environment.

Strategies:

- Study and develop recommendations for improving neighborhood relations and communications (e.g., invite neighbors to events).
- Enhance student community service and communicate ways in which our students and staff serve the community.
- Continue to educate the community and current members of the School about the mission and philosophy and about progressive education in general:

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- Identify the communication strategies that will be used by Green Acres to focus on the Intentional Model, addressing the objectives described above. Integrate core messaging into all communication platforms (school publications, admissions materials, website, and community outreach).
- Work with staff to identify opportunities for parent education, and to market these opportunities. Focus on “customer service” and building community.
- Work with staff to enhance parent communication, ensuring that core messaging is integrated throughout.
- Provide routine mechanisms for parent feedback and input (e.g., surveys, forums).
- Continue to develop and enhance the “Bring-a-Friend Parent Gathering” model as a vehicle for prospective parent recruitment.
- Leverage key events to market Green Acres’ leadership position (e.g., *Going Places*, 75th anniversary, National Progressive Education conference, distinguished Speaker Series).
- Consider opportunities to translate marketing materials into Spanish.
- Continue to monitor demographic trends in the School’s existing target market and surrounding areas. Identify opportunities for demographic and multicultural growth.
- Evolve the Green Acres website into:
 - A comprehensive online community for existing and prospective parents, and staff.
 - The “go-to” site about progressive education.
- Determine what attracts our existing community (e.g., surveying newly admitted families) and conduct demographic analyses of Green Acres’ existing target market and surrounding areas to assess changing demographics and other future trends that may impact the School.
- Continue to develop and implement marketing strategies to help attract a diverse, multicultural school community.
- Continue to highlight the unique experience and advantages of our middle school, including excellent outcomes (e.g., high school and college placement record).
- Work toward “institutionalizing” marketing at Green Acres:
 - Continually emphasize the important roles of the Board, staff, and parents.
 - Explore the feasibility of a full-time marketing professional.

Development

Vision: *A Development program that generates broad philanthropic participation from all constituents, that provides the School with sufficient resources to support the program, and that offers sustainability for the future of Green Acres.*

Challenges:

- Increased financial pressure, including rising tuition costs, for donor families.
- Persuading donors to make Green Acres a philanthropic priority relative to other potential choices.
- Ensuring that the participatory and egalitarian mission and culture of the School guide all development endeavors.
- Continuing to grow donor participation and level of support for the School and its programs.

Objectives:

- Strengthen the culture of philanthropy among parents and the extended alumni community.
- Maximize the potential of all fund raising opportunities.
- Enhance the current Planned Giving Program.
- Reduce dependence on yearly giving and grow endowment. Strive to raise funds equal to 6.0% of operating budget from contributions and events.
- Ensure adequate staffing and technology in the Development Office.

Rationale:

- Continuing to educate the Green Acres community about the needs of the School will enhance the culture of philanthropy.
- Improving philanthropy and increasing endowment will contribute to the sustainability of Green Acres.

Strategies:

- Explore ways to increase donor participation and gift size.
- Schedule donor recognition events and work with GASPA to provide outreach, education, and discussion regarding the role of development to meet budgeted programmatic needs of the School.
- Seek Board support and funding to determine the feasibility of a capital campaign focused on endowment growth.
- Promote a more visible Planned Giving Program through improved marketing and donor education.
- Continue to improve donor recognition and gift stewardship.
- Update the website and related technologies to enhance marketing and fundraising efforts.
- Build on the success of annual events, such as the Auction and Grandparents' Day.
- Plan campus events around the 75th anniversary of Green Acres School to celebrate community and to strengthen relationships with alumni and former staff.

Finance

Vision: *A strategic financial plan that allows the School's leaders to view the budgeting process with a long-range perspective. At the same time, the School will continue to grow its endowment to enhance financial stability, to support the growing needs of the program, and to protect against pricing families out of the school community.*

Challenges:

- Rising tuition costs are a key concern for sustainability and affect Green Acres School's ability to recruit and retain students.
- Difficult choices often will need to be made between desirable alternatives.
- Rising tuition may increase the financial aid needs of Green Acres' families.

Objectives:

- Raise revenue sufficient to support an outstanding progressive education and to maintain Green Acres' niche in the marketplace.
- Control annual tuition increases and costs to ensure viability; maintain a tuition level below the 75th percentile of our Peer School group.
- Examine and understand the effects of tuition costs and financial aid on enrollment, attrition, and diversity.
- Reduce the percentage of tuition in the operating budget by seeking other revenue sources.
- Develop long-range strategic and financial planning, and encourage "blue-sky" thinking for the future.
- Inform the community more completely about Green Acres School's financial situation and decisions.

Rationale:

- It is important to live within our means, while seeking to enhance our position as a leader in progressive education.
- It is important to keep the community fully informed as to choices/priorities and budgets.

Strategies:

- In connection with the 75th Anniversary celebration, explore the feasibility of a capital campaign focused on endowment growth. (See Development Section)
- To help meet our goals of increasing revenues and controlling costs, task forces should examine: (i) intermediate steps needed to address the limitations placed on the School by our zoning agreements; (ii) developing new auxiliary revenue sources and alternative uses of facilities; (iii) developing enhanced and innovative fundraising efforts; (iv) increasing volunteerism to reduce costs; and (v) re-examining ways tuition is determined and effects of financial aid on school enrollment and attrition.
- Adopt and implement a strategic financial plan.
- Ensure the budget process includes an analysis of the long-range view, including projections of alternative scenarios. Specific strategic planning options should be budgeted and taken into account.
- Review impact of tuition increases and other financial decisions on economic diversity, including a reexamination of Green Acres' financial aid policy and budgeting.

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- Take steps (e.g., resurrect the All-on-Board communications) to better educate the community about Green Acres School finances.
- Form an Audit Committee as recommended by the 2007 AIMS Report.

Personnel

Vision: *An improved professional development program for staff, a training site for student teachers or interns interested in learning progressive educational practices. The School will also recruit an ever more diverse staff and will maintain and enhance salary and benefits to retain the highest quality personnel.*

Challenges:

- Recruiting and maintaining talented progressive educators, considering financial and other pressures caused by living in our area.
- Providing sufficient professional development funding and support to continue to strengthen pedagogy and curriculum.

Objectives:

- Emphasize recruitment and retention of staff that are committed to, and knowledgeable about, progressive educational practices.
- Ensure that the School is staffed in a way that best meets the varying needs of the student body.
- Recruit and hire a racially and ethnically diverse staff.
- Work toward a salary level at the mean of our Peer School group.
- Expand professional development experiences for staff, with principles and practices of progressive education as a core feature. Increase funding for professional development by 25% each year with the goal of reaching 1% of operating budget.

Rationale:

- Maintaining an outstanding, diverse faculty that is committed to progressive educational practices is essential to the School's mission and promotes the quality of education of our children.
- Expanding professional development provides opportunities for growth, improves the educational experience for both teachers and students, and strengthens recruitment and retention of strong faculty.
- Maintaining an outstanding faculty that understands and can effectively implement progressive educational practices is at the core of the School's mission.

Strategies:

- Continue to assess the current compensation package with special consideration of the balance between salaries and benefits.
 - Reduce the tuition burden for staff children.
 - Research the availability of grants and other awards to encourage professional development and supplement pay.
 - Consider increasing funding devoted to the summer grant program for staff professional development.
- Assess current class sizes and staffing levels to meet program needs effectively.
- Assess the current mentoring program, with a specific focus on both the degree to which new staff are supported in their transition to Green Acres and the degree to which they are exposed to progressive educational philosophy and practices.

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- Develop ongoing professional development for the entire staff focused on progressive educational ideas and teaching practices.
 - Increase annual funding for professional development.
 - Continue to emphasize information technology resources and technology training for all staff.
 - Offer increased guidance for staff with regard to professional development offerings.
- Assess the benefits of increased and/or re-allocated staffing related to curriculum coordination, as well as counseling, learning, and reading support.
- Explore the possibility of Green Acres becoming a progressive education center, including a possible internship program or site for student teachers. Consider the development of a partnership with teacher training schools and programs.
- Review and revise the teacher evaluation system, with a focus on providing meaningful, comprehensive feedback on classroom practices. Consider a review of the evaluation system for all Green Acres staff members.

Diversity

Vision: *To honor the School's mission of embracing all forms of diversity by ensuring that Green Acres remains a welcoming place for all families, by attending to the financial constraints which hinder socioeconomic diversity, and by deepening efforts to recruit diverse staff and families. The School will strive to develop best practices, both in the teaching of diversity topics within the curriculum and in its support for diverse families, staff, and students.*

Challenges:

- Rising tuition and other financial pressures that restrict socioeconomic diversity among students and staff.
- Fostering a sense of community for students, staff, and parents that promotes and embraces our diversity.
- Ensuring that the members of our community continue to understand the vital importance of diversity to progressive education and the health of the School.

Objectives:

- Pursue financial and outreach strategies that will help to maintain socioeconomic diversity. Work toward ensuring that at least 20% of students receive financial aid.
- Continue to embrace, enhance, and celebrate our diversity as a community. Seek at least 33% students of ethnic, racial, and national diversity.
- Promote the educational importance of diversity and build understanding (in and beyond the curriculum) that diversity is multifaceted.

Rationale:

- A healthy environment must reflect the everyday lives of our community and the complex world around it.
- Diversity has been a foundation of the Green Acres School mission since the School's founding 74 years ago.
- The last decade has seen a broadened definition of diversity and increased learning within the school community.

Strategies:

- Review the impact of tuition increases and other financial decisions on economic diversity, including a reexamination of Green Acres' financial aid policy.
- Strengthen core messaging and target recruitment efforts to increase the diversity of staff and students.
- Increase efforts to retain families who broaden the School's diversity of socioeconomic, racial, and cultural backgrounds.
- Increase diversity on the Board and on Committees; emphasize the importance of diversity as part of the nomination process.
- Provide professional workshops on ways to make the School both welcoming and diverse.
- Continue to organize and promote special events to celebrate our diversity, such as the Heritage Fair.
- Continue to promote the importance of diversity as a key part of an integrated curriculum.
- Improve transportation and explore extended day options.
- Generate and promote a "History of Diversity at Green Acres School" document.

Facilities

Vision: *A facility that reflects both the warmth of Green Acres' small community and our progressive approach to schooling. The School will enhance our campus by modeling "green" practices and developing technology resources. We will also be more broadly accessible to our neighbors and others, both as a way to build community and as a way to garner revenue.*

Challenges:

- Maintaining and enhancing Green Acres' excellent facilities.
- Environmental implications of facilities needs and operating requirements.

Objectives:

- Ensure that Green Acres' facilities and technological resources continue to support the School's program needs.
- Promote and practice environmental awareness in all facilities decisions and seek to have Green Acres certified a "green school."
- Explore alternate uses of facilities to support programming objectives, to strengthen community relations, and to provide an additional source of revenue.

Rationale:

- Maintaining outstanding facilities is essential to Green Acres' program.
- It is consistent with our progressive values and with our School's Mission to seek to minimize the School's environmental impact, and to model and teach environmental consciousness.

Strategies:

- Conduct a facilities audit to assess needs and to review our replacement reserve plan. Pay special attention to energy consumption.
- Examine and develop alternate uses of facilities (e.g., rental of gym, movie nights, speaker series).
- Seek ways of financing additional "blue sky" facilities needs (e.g., additional technology, padding in gym, sound equipment).
- Continue to assess and improve campus accessibility for people with physical disabilities.
- Implement safety recommendations from the 2007 AIMS evaluation regarding fire drills, electronic door entry, and review of play areas.
- Take steps to have Green Acres certified a "green school," including creation of a recycling program as recommended in AIMS self-study.

Governance

Vision: *A Board of Trustees that models the best practices of independent school governance as defined by NAIS, including development of strategic, long-term planning, increased clarity about the role of the Board and its committees, and improved communication and transparency about the Board's work among all Green Acres constituents.*

Challenges:

- Short-term planning inhibits our ability to address long-term strategic and financial challenges.
- Limited understanding of Board decision-making can lead to confusion and distrust within the community.
- Finding ways to expand opportunities for parents, particularly newcomers, to get involved.

Objectives:

- Improve effectiveness of Board meetings and Board procedures for reviewing policies and issues.
- Continue to improve the Board evaluation process and clarify responsibilities and expectations for trustees.
- Develop long-term financial and strategic plans and ensure appropriate follow-up.
- Assess and improve the Board's role in supporting and evaluating the Head of the School.
- Improve Board communications with the community and increase involvement by Board and community members in Board meetings, committees and school events.

Rationale:

- Building and maintaining a strong, invested Board and governance process will help to ensure the long-term success of Green Acres in meeting its objectives.
- Greater involvement means more people will be informed and take a stake in decisions.

Strategies:

- Develop processes to improve trustee orientation/education and ensure that trustees understand their roles and responsibilities, including the NAIS principles of good practice, Green Acres mission, by-laws and policies, nonprofit finance, and philanthropy.
- Take active steps to improve board communication with the community, including use of "Gasline" and postings on the website to discuss Board news.
- Create formal and informal links for trustees to communicate with Corporation members at large.
- Finalize and adopt a long-term strategic and financial plan, including financial planning, development work, and marketing to ensure sustainability. Adopt procedures to monitor and address periodic progress in implementing the plan.
- Review the Head evaluation procedures established in 2002 and the Board's role in supporting the Head of the School.
- Continue to improve the Board's self-evaluation process and take steps to implement improvements identified in the self-evaluation process.

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- Encourage increased parent and trustee participation on Board committees as a way to improve functioning of the committees and identify potential future Trustees.
- Develop a plan for providing more structure for Board Committees and establish standards for membership as well as voting mechanisms.
- Develop a plan for providing ongoing education of the Green Acres School community regarding the procedures and process for nominating and electing Trustees.
- Develop a policy for more frequent reviews of and revisions to by-laws and Board policies, i.e., every two years (current issues include Trustee and officer elections).
- Review the current Corporation governance structure and identify potential options for improvement.
- Enhance the visibility of the Board by increasing attendance of Trustees at Green Acres School events.