

CATHEDRAL SCHOOL FOR BOYS

State
of the
School
2015–2016



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From the desk of Headmaster Burns Jones

For some time now, I have been promising to report on emerging plans for the future of Cathedral School for Boys (CSB). It takes time to get to know a school well, but I haven't wanted to wait too long for us to begin moving ahead. We are now in a position to think and act strategically. I am so excited about the prospects for the future of our wonderful school.

The evaluation of a school represents one of the most important responsibilities for any incoming head. This work requires a great deal of listening, analysis, and reflection, and I have never felt that what works for one school works for all schools. Each school is different; each mission is unique. Thus, I have used our Mission's charge "*to provide an excellent education for boys*" as the primary guide during this process of transition and assessment. This statement also reconciles with my own belief that schools should strive for excellence in everything they do.

"To provide an excellent education for boys."

So far, I have held 138 meetings with staff, Board members, parents, other heads of schools, and members of the greater San Francisco community to discuss CSB. I have visited other Bay Area schools. I have also met with countless boys, including just about every member of the eighth-grade class. We have conducted four surveys. We have discussed the School's future at nine parent coffees. We have enlisted the counsel of three outside educational experts. I have reviewed accreditation reports, prior strategic plans, test scores, and historical documents. I have also studied the research on boys' education. This may not be a perfect method of approach, but it has been thorough.

Who are we?

While this transition has allowed me to evaluate where we might be headed, it has also reinforced the attributes that distinguish CSB from other schools and that have made us "excellent" for the better part of a century.

CSB is a boys' school.

We appreciate the distinct educational and social advantages that boys' schools offer and the benefits that accrue to each boy in this unique environment.

CSB is a small school.

We understand that our size allows us to know each boy well and to help him become his very best self.

CSB is a diverse school.

We recognize that all students benefit from a diverse and inclusive school community, and each of us is made better by the multiplicity of people, ideas, and experience at CSB.

CSB is committed to the development of the whole-boy.

We acknowledge that responsible elementary and middle school education must attend to all areas of a boy's development—his mind, his body, his character, and his spirit.

CSB is a school that sets high academic and personal standards.

We challenge each boy to be his best, and we push each boy to achieve in everything that he takes on.

These attributes should remain as much a part of Cathedral School's future as they have its past. Thus, while I am excited about what lies ahead, we should work to preserve the enduring qualities that distinguish a Cathedral School education.

**“We are fortunate to have such a healthy school,
and it is because of our strength
that we are in a position to move ahead.”**

This transition has also confirmed perceptions that I had about CSB prior to my arrival. Namely, our school is in great shape. While we know this intuitively, there are a number of markers that demonstrate this more objectively. These include:

1 Admission

- Inquiries and applications are up 10% from last year.
- Our application pool includes families from 35 preschools and over 50 ZIP codes.
- Last year, 100% of the boys accepted in first through eighth grades enrolled at CSB.

2 Retention & Enrollment

- Over the last decade, we have retained, on average, 97% of our students (compared to 91% among independent schools nationally and 92% among California independent schools).
- Almost 40% of our students are students of color (compared to 28% nationally).

3 Finances & Fundraising

- Our endowment is approaching \$15 million.
- We maintain one of the largest endowment-per-student ratios among our Bay Area peers.
- Our recent six-month campaign raised over \$3 million.
- Last year, 99% of our parents and 100% of our staff contributed to the Cathedral School Fund.
- The Cathedral School Fund has just eclipsed the \$1 million mark for the first time in school history.

4 Program

- Last year, 80% of the eighth-grade class scored in the top 50% on the SSAT and 53% scored in the top 25% on the SSAT.
- All of our students study art, drama, and music.
- Roughly 95% of our Upper School students participate in a sport at CSB.

We are fortunate to have such a healthy school, and it is because of our strength that we are in a position to move ahead.

What are we doing?

While this letter is intended to initiate conversations about our future, there are a number of decisions that we have made or are in the process of making for next year that deserve communication. In some cases, these decisions complete work that began prior to my arrival.

We are establishing a curriculum development process that will evaluate every curricular area every four years. This process will include funding for outside experts, staff professional development, and new academic materials to ensure that each year's review is thorough and that the results are well implemented.

We have created a new administrative position of Director of Curriculum for next year and expect to fill this position soon.

We will teach math every day at all grade levels next year. This decision will allow us to offer more comprehensive and thorough instruction. We are also evaluating our Upper School math curriculum as a logical extension of the Lower School math curriculum review completed last year.

We are repositioning our learning resources staff to better accommodate academic needs. Courtney Graham will continue her work as our Lower School reading specialist and will also work as our Lower School learning resources instructor. Jackie Munz will concentrate on learning resources in our Upper School.

We have realigned our technology staff to devote more attention to student and teacher education. Tom Rankin will concentrate on educational technology; Frank Torrano will concentrate on systems and infrastructure. Our technology staff is also working to develop a robotics curriculum.

We continue to consider a one-to-one laptop program in the Upper School beginning in the 2017–2018 academic year and hope to finalize plans by the end of this school year.

We have started a process to review the school's disciplinary policy and expect to make changes to our policy for next year.

We are in the process of creating a new position of Assistant Director of Admission to help manage the volume of applications that we receive and to commit even more attention to diversity and Upper School student recruitment.

Other ideas include an evaluation of our six-day schedule, the possible expansion of our modern language program, the development of an engineering curriculum, and a review of our writing curriculum. These ideas will continue to percolate and may well evolve into actual work in the coming months. While these decisions are more mechanical than strategic, we believe that they will help position us to provide an even stronger education next year.

Where are we headed?

And now to what might lie ahead. I have been considering the future of our school and the goals that will help us fulfill our responsibility to provide the very best educational experience for boys. For a variety of reasons, our appreciation for what “an excellent education for boys” might look like in the future will be different from what it has looked like in the past.

“One of the great difficulties of modern education is that we must prepare our students for an ever-changing and unpredictable world.”

The world is changing at an inestimable pace. Global, social, and technological developments have made the practice of education much more complicated and uncertain. One of the great difficulties of modern education is that we must prepare our students for an ever-changing and unpredictable world. The fact is that the best approaches to education *now* look much different than they did when we were in school, and they will look much different 10, or even five, years from now. The realities of the world and the responsibility of schools to develop successful and globally competent citizens demand as much. It should be the great hope—if not the expectation—for schools like CSB that we are preparing our boys to make a real and positive difference in the world.

With this context in mind, there are a number of broad goals that seem appropriate to the future of our school and to the development of the type of young men that our world needs.

Clarify Cathedral School's academic identity and develop academic programs in ways that incorporate the best modern educational practices and prepare our boys for global citizenship.

The finest schools now realize that the educational paradigm must change in order to prepare students for the complicated world that they will enter as adults. While content continues to be important, educational practices over the last decade have emphasized the development of certain skills now deemed essential for success in a global society. Many of these skills—communication, collaboration, cultural awareness—have been components of our curriculum for some time now. However, CSB would benefit from an updated, clear, and well-recognized academic identity. This identity, in turn, should help inform future curricular and programmatic developments. In this way, the various components of our program would reconcile with our academic identity and be united by rigor, best practice, and a global approach.

Establish CSB as an international leader in boys' education.

Cathedral is known nationally. Our teachers have, in many cases, decades of experience educating boys. We are well-versed in best educational practices for boys. We have established institutional programs and structures to support the ways boys learn. However, there are ways to use our knowledge and experience not only to advance learning within the School but also to help other schools in their effort to teach boys. Furthermore, by serving other schools, Cathedral has an opportunity to model the very same commitment to service that we seek to instill in our students. Thus, we should leverage our knowledge of boys' learning to create an even more vibrant learning environment for our boys and to help other schools do the same.

Develop exemplary programs of service and leadership.

Episcopal schools, in general, and Cathedral, in particular, have long maintained a commitment to service as an instrumental component of our educational approach. This commitment stems from our understanding that we all carry responsibilities to the world at large, and that it is important for us to instill a sense of service in our students. Related is the belief that the best leaders are called to serve. We need better leaders now more than ever before. The time is right for us to develop exemplary programs of service and leadership that will develop the type of young men we both want and need.

Revamp our campus and look beyond it to support the learning needs of boys and foster modern approaches to instruction.


The very same factors that are contributing to educational change should prompt us to reevaluate the way we consider and use campus space. It is exciting to imagine how we might reconfigure our campus to make our school more boy-friendly and to support the modern instructional approaches used by our teachers. Larger classrooms, modernized laboratory space, the development of the terrace, and the creation of new classrooms for engineering and robotics would exalt teaching and learning at CSB. But our evaluation of space should not end there. We sit within one of the most remarkable cities in the world, and the learning possibilities right outside our campus doors are unparalleled. We should reconsider space and our use of it—both on campus and off—to foster more modern and boy-friendly approaches to learning at CSB.

Attract, retain, and develop the very best educators in the country.

The quality of any work is conditioned upon the strength of our staff. Some of the best educators in the country are drawn to San Francisco because of the unique professional and cultural opportunities that it provides. It is, however, becoming more difficult for our teachers to live comfortably in the city. In addition, the pace of change in education makes robust professional development programs more important than ever before. We should perpetuate a professional environment that attracts and retains the very best educators in the country and, in doing so, enhance the culture and learning environment of the School.

Although I have listed some ideas for our future, I know, too, that the best vision is both formed and held collectively. Thus, these ideas and others would benefit from the consideration of the school community.

A few weeks ago, the Cathedral School Board of Trustees voted to begin our next strategic planning process. This plan will include input from the school community; in fact, whatever emerges will be made that much stronger because of your involvement. I trust that the results will accrue most readily to the benefit of our boys, and in doing so, will allow us to deliver the finest possible education for boys, anywhere. You can expect to hear more from the Board and me about this process later this spring.

The conversation is just beginning, and I look forward to all that our work together will bring to Cathedral School for Boys in the coming months and years. We have a truly remarkable school, and as both a father and as a Headmaster, I am so excited about what lies ahead. 

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