The College Preparatory School

Strategic Plan

Adopted by the Board of Trustees on December 10, 2013

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Dear Friends,

School days are marked by their own distinctive rhythms. We throw ourselves into them fully, sometimes almost unaware of all that is being accomplished as the months fly by. Reflecting, teachers marvel at how their students’ ideas have matured and coalesced. As summer approaches, backpacks are shed and we see our students collectively exhale, take stock, and look ahead.

School communities, too, need punctuating moments when they can step back from the rhythms of the days and years in order to exhale, take stock, and look ahead. Here at College Prep we have been deeply engaged in creating the 2013-20 Strategic Plan. To envision the next seven years, we looked at ourselves, our past strategic plans, and the rapidly changing world around us. Along the way, we revisited and refined our Mission and Philosophy statement, researched educational trends and best practices, surveyed our student and parent community, held a Community Summit, and piloted innovative programs to test our assumptions. Our new strategic plan illuminates what we believe is next for College Prep, helping us guide the growth and evolution of this remarkable school.

Many people participated in our planning process. We have been repeatedly heartened by the enthusiastic involvement of our alumni, teachers and staff, current and past parents, students, and the Board of Trustees. All gave generously of their time to reflect, discuss, and strategize. We thank them for their valuable contributions to this effort.

Great schools stay great through their ongoing interest in the ways and worlds around them. We invite you to join us as we steward College Prep toward a worthy and inspiring expression of its mission.

Sincerely,

Monique DeVane, Head of School

Marc Sugiyama ’84
Chair, Strategic Planning Steering Committee
Member, Board of Trustees
OUR MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY

Mission
At College Prep we believe in the foundational importance of scholarship, the value of dialogue, and the need for academically curious young people to belong to a kind, creative, diverse, and joyful community. We challenge our students to engage deeply in learning, appreciate one another, and grow into adults who are intellectually adventurous, ethically sure-footed, and generous of heart and spirit.

Philosophy
Guided by mens conscia recti, “a mind aware of what is right,” College Prep develops each student’s strengths and capacities through an education based on ten core beliefs.

1. We value the individuality of our community members and our egalitarian school culture.

2. We believe that high expectations, kindled curiosity, and dedicated effort encourage students to discern excellence and strive to do their best.

3. We affirm that deep learning requires patience, creativity, reflection, and practice.

4. We cultivate an awareness of self and others that is rooted in respect and empathy and emphasizes the importance of taking responsibility for one’s impact and actions.

5. We work in a collaborative environment that gives young people opportunities to take risks, express themselves, and appreciate the perspectives and gifts of others.

6. We embrace the variety of backgrounds and life experiences within our community and recognize that the rich expression of diversity is essential to a meaningful education.

7. We integrate work and play, helping students recognize the elements of a balanced life.

8. We foster an understanding of interdependence and stewardship that starts with care for our open-air Oakland campus and extends to our greater community.

9. We prepare students to make a positive difference, encouraging engagement in a full array of school activities, and in service and learning opportunities in the broader world.

10. We dedicate ourselves, as teachers and mentors, to our own ongoing development, modeling commitment to learning and growth.

Mission and Philosophy adopted by the Board of Trustees, June 2013
Since College Prep’s 1960 founding, our focus has remained on our people—our students, families, and faculty—and their rich and productive dialogue with one another. This focus has served us well. Visitors to our school often marvel at how engaged and engaging our students and teachers are. Standards are high, and hard work is emphasized; at the same time, the culture is one of kindness, warmth, and care. And in spite of how selective today’s top colleges are, their admission officers remain impressed by our students’ readiness, admitting them at rates greatly exceeding national averages. Closer to home, interest in College Prep is clear in the robust number of admissions applications we receive each year. The confidence and support of current and past parents and alumni is evident in the recent success of our FiftyForward fundraising campaign, one that celebrated our fifty-year anniversary in 2010 with $13 million dollars of support for endowment and new buildings.

As we have grown in reputation, we have also grown in numbers. After completing a comprehensive “Size of School” study, we believe that our current size of 360 students is the right enrollment number for us. For College Prep’s educational mission, a steady enrollment of 360 ensures our ability to stay committed to intimate and relationship-based teaching and learning while also providing a rich selection of courses and programs. At this size, we believe we can both offer an exceptional education and thrive within our means.

As productively happy as we have been teaching and learning in our North Oakland glen of a campus, we know that we are not isolated from the challenges and opportunities of the larger world. We have done considerable soul-searching and fact-finding about our place in the broader educational landscape and how we might build on our strengths in service to our students. Our students are coming of age in a time that requires them to be adept navigators of social and cultural diversity and responsible users of the natural resources of their environment. We also see how evolving technologies are quickly being folded into and sometimes supplanting traditional teaching models. Boundaries between the academic and actual, and between theoretical and applied work, are increasingly bridged. Our students are hungry for the hands-on skills that the 21st century asks of them. We see opportunities for our own growth in all of these areas and strive to pursue them while preserving the best of our founding aims and culture.

We are also conscious of the financial realities facing independent schools. Our model is an expensive one, and shifting economic times test our abilities to project our future budgetary resources and needs. As we strive to moderate the rate of tuition increases, we will need to make thoughtful and prudent use of our resources. To truly thrive as a school that hires outstanding faculty and staff, offers generous financial assistance to promising young people, and develops current curricular technologies and facilities, College Prep must both budget carefully and continue to inspire the support of its extended family. Alumni, in particular, will play a critical role in ensuring that the educational experience from which they benefited is accessible to the generations to come.
Considering these programmatic and environmental strengths, challenges, and opportunities, we believe that College Prep is best served by a strategic direction that emphasizes three specific aims:

**Clarity**
Rather than try to be all things to all people, College Prep must be clear and unapologetic about its distinctive mission and identity. In its plans and actions, the school will express a focused commitment to and understanding of its purpose, programs, and initiatives. This clarity will enable the wise and strategic use of school resources and inspire broad enthusiasm and support from all segments of its community.

**Relevance**
As College Prep plans for the future, we must consider both our timeless strengths and those areas in which innovation is required. We must ensure that our graduates are well prepared for a world that is increasingly diverse, interconnected, and competitive. Over the next seven years, our school will need to invest strategically in both the core and evolutionary aspects of its program, with sensitivity to the shifting expectations of parents, students, and colleges.

**Value**
College Prep’s continued health is largely dependent on our ability to offer a truly exceptional educational experience, particularly in relationship to its price. At the heart of this model has been our core commitment to talented students, small classes, and a first-rate faculty. We must address how we can prioritize and balance the competing financial demands of this formula while moderating growth in tuition. Securing increased philanthropic support while maintaining our prudent approach to budgeting practices will enable the school to continue to support these essential programs and values.

As we steward College Prep into the future, our overarching aim is to ensure that the school continues to fulfill its mission and maintain its vitality. Ms. Jenks held dear the belief that the cultivation of the intellect was, in and of itself, a social benefit. The school’s motto, mens conscia recti, echoes and extends this conviction, compelling us to prepare students for lives of accomplishment, meaning, and service to the greater good. We are confident that this focus will remain the centerpiece of our endeavors.
OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

The conversations around our newly minted Mission and Philosophy statement have spurred us to ask whether we are living the vision we have of ourselves, and where we can crystallize what we want into what we do. The strategic plan looks at the Mission through the lenses of both the above-described aims of clarity, relevance, and value, and through four critical dimensions of school life: College Prep’s People, Program, Place, and Presence.

I. PEOPLE

Ensure our ability to recruit and retain talented and diverse faculty, staff, and students whose values align with those of the school.

Time and time again, research confirms the transformative power of even a single engaged and talented teacher or coach. At College Prep, our students experience four years filled with extraordinary mentors who are as savvy about their disciplines as they are caring about their students. It is little wonder, then, that College Prep has continued to invest most heavily in hiring and cultivating a superb faculty and staff. We think this is a defining strength of College Prep and one that we should maintain; generations of alumni and parents agree.

In the near future, a significant number of our long-standing faculty will be retiring. As we lose this core group of master teachers, we must be prepared to compete effectively for the next generation of premier faculty and staff (sometimes from universities and the private sector), maintaining a cadre of adults who are as diverse in their backgrounds as are our students. Once teachers are a part of our community, the school must continue to invest in their growth by providing critical guidance and support for their ongoing professional development. In this way, our school will prove to be a satisfying and sustaining professional home for teachers who are committed to inspiring the minds and souls of students for years to come.

The need to attract and retain an exemplary faculty is rivaled only by the need to remain accessible to talented students from a range of backgrounds and quarters. Students partner with the school every day to help create our culture of curiosity and kindness; the significance of a diverse, achievement-oriented, engaged student body cannot be overestimated as a vital dimension of the College Prep experience. The availability of financial assistance is a critical tool needed to ensure that all students who would be well served by the school can aspire to attend. At present nearly 25% of the student body receives some financial assistance from a budget that is just over $2 million. This is a generous commitment, and yet significant work in this area remains to be done.

The talent and diversity found within College Prep’s community is extraordinary, flavored and informed by the school’s vibrant, multicultural environs. Serving students from a broad range of backgrounds and life experiences both stretches and strengthens us, demanding that we think carefully about issues of equity, inclusion, and opportunity. We are proud of the school’s substantial commitment to this vital area of school life, and know that we must continue to invest in and strengthen our capacities here.

Talent and Accessibility

A. Identify new sources of funding for additional financial aid, including funds to support full program participation for aid recipients.

B. Expand outreach efforts to reach prospective students and families, deepening the pool of qualified applicants.

C. Ensure that students and families from all backgrounds feel fully supported in their ability to take full advantage of the school’s program and offerings.

Sustaining a Premier Faculty

D. Hire and retain faculty who embody the core qualities of scholarship, craftsmanship, and a commitment to participating in the full life of the school.

E. Shift over time the composition of the teaching faculty to more closely mirror that of the student body, particularly focusing on hiring and mentoring members of underrepresented groups for positions in core academic subjects.

F. Increase support for faculty and staff professional development, including opportunities for leadership of new programs.

II. PROGRAM

Deepen the school’s traditional strengths while investing in academic innovation and a more robust approach to community ethos and student life.

The world has changed in significant ways since our founding in 1960 and is on course to change even more in the years ahead. As a school, we have a duty to position our students to be ready for rapid developments in technology and globalization, and to thrive in a world that is increasingly connected, interdependent, and cross-pollinating.
Fortunately for College Prep, we see our traditional programmatic strengths reflected in and buoyed by the skills projected to be required of 21st century citizens. While it might appear avant-garde, there is nothing new to us about the value in educating students to become confident critical thinkers, communicators, and collaborators. The tools we use to teach these skills, however, continue to evolve. Opportunities to integrate new technologies and interact with knowledge in both reflective and hands-on ways will only enhance student preparation. We are excited about piloting and evaluating new approaches to teaching and learning, knowing that doing so is the best way to grow and adapt our program.

Even as we integrate new methodologies, we are confident in the enduring relevance of our academic core, liberal arts framework, and dialog-based approach, all of which can be enriched but not replaced by technology-based experiences. The liberal arts stoke and enable the development and expression of empathy, a humanizing trait required for the ethical practices demanded by our motto, mens conscia recti. We want our students to have the strength of both intellect and character to ensure that the greater good looms large in their future decisions.

Both within and beyond the classroom, we recognize the need to continue fostering the kinds of multi-faceted student-teacher relationships that guide and support young people discovering their passions and interests. Recognizing the innate value of belonging, we will cultivate a more robust approach to community ethos and student life. Without ceding the importance of high standards, we want to develop our students’ sense of personal balance, empathy, and resilience. In honing these skills, we believe students will more fully realize their capacities to make a positive difference.

Our students’ understanding of their place in the world can be transformed by the relationships that they build within it. We want College Prep students to benefit from mentoring and learning relationships with those in our immediate Bay Area environs and in more geographically distant places. We seek the help of our friends and extended community to help connect our students and our school to the world beyond our campus.

**The Academic Core**

A. Invest in the core academic program’s balanced emphasis on skills and content, enriching both through a focus on:

1. students’ ability to demonstrate understanding through writing, public speaking, and visual representation;
2. creative thinking and expression;
3. collaboration among students and within the faculty;
4. integration into our classrooms of current research on teaching, learning and best pedagogical practices.

B. Foster multifaceted student-teacher relationships characterized by mentoring and support.

**Curricular Evolution**

C. Create a Time Task Force to consider and propose alternatives to the daily schedule and calendar.

D. Explore expansion of applied studies options, using the model of the STEM/Scientific Research course sequence.

E. Expand opportunities for hands-on learning, including the development of a campus facility that supports design thinking and modeling.

F. Clarify and develop a plan for integrating blended learning opportunities into College Prep’s program, focusing first on our role as a founding school of the Bay Area Blend-Ed Learning Consortium.

G. Experiment with instructional models that depart from the traditional single course/single credit (team teaching, instructional pods of varying sizes, quarter-credit electives).

**Student Life and Experience**

H. Redesign the advisory system and health programs to improve student well-being and community ethos.

I. Foster pride, spirit, and belonging by creating more mentored and graduated opportunities for engagement and leadership in a wide range of co-curricular and athletic offerings.

J. Identify and develop opportunities for regional, national, and international partnerships that expand our students’ worldview and self-understanding.
III. PLACE

Develop a vision and plan for our unique site that meets our program needs while preserving the campus’ informal, flexible, and verdant character.

Tucked in a small valley in the Oakland, our campus is home to our people and programs. For thirty years we have lived on our five acres with remarkable efficiency—learning, socializing, and otherwise occupying a space the size of some schools’ playing fields. When weather permits and lessons encourage, we instruct on the central walkway, in the green spaces, on the paths, and in the gully. Nearly all doors open onto the spine of our central campus instead of hallways; the views from our windows show a pleasing balance of natural and built landscape. We treasure our open-air atmosphere for the wonderful connections it permits us to the natural world and to each other.

Although abundant in character, our campus and facilities also present us with real and persistent challenges. A number of our buildings remain the original World War II era portables brought to the site in 1982. Many of our classrooms are restrictively small and inflexible. The school has limited ability to provide lunch to its students and few options for them to gather informally indoors to eat or study; on wet winter days, staying dry is often difficult. Other than the gymnasium, we lack a single indoor gathering space large enough for the entire community to assemble comfortably for activities such as lectures, plays, and concerts. Performing arts practice and performance spaces could be greatly improved, as could athletic and workout facilities.

Every inch of our campus is a classroom of sorts. As such, it is important that it reflects our community’s values. We see opportunities for our facilities and operations to evolve in ways that lighten our environmental footprint, teaching and modeling important lessons of sustainability. We also seek to improve campus accessibility, ensuring that our facilities are more readily accessible to people with mobility challenges.

Though extravagant buildings and amenities will never be our style, it is critical that we have facilities that appropriately support our programs and our efforts to continue to attract top-tier students. Now that we have a clear vision around school size, it is time to take the long view about campus development. In support of this work, the school has undertaken comprehensive campus and facilities master planning that will clarify and prioritize our various needs. With an articulated long-range vision and plan for our unique site, we will be better able to meet the needs of our operations while preserving the campus’ informal, flexible, and verdant character.

Facilities that Support Program

A. Address and prioritize program needs:
   1. Whole school gathering space;
   2. Teaching spaces of varying sizes and purposes;
   3. Video conferencing/tech capacities;
   4. Performance/arts/exhibition spaces;
   5. More use of campus as a sustainability classroom;
   6. Athletic/workout facilities;
   7. Catering/kitchen capacity;
   8. 21st century library;
   9. Design and modeling studio space.

A Campus that Reflects our Values

B. Improve accessibility throughout the campus.
C. Measure and reduce environmental impact of plant and program.
D. Use landscaping strategy to optimize indoor/outdoor campus culture.
E. Improve parking and transportation options.
F. Improve campus entrance and perimeter treatment.
IV. PRESENCE
Manage our reputation and relationships with the broader community, cultivating the trust, regard, and loyalty of present and future stakeholders.

Our identity is more than our intent; it is also created by our actions and how we are perceived or experienced, whether through personal contact, word of mouth, written materials, or social media. College Prep has an almost bifurcated presence: the school inspires enormous respect and loyalty from some, and a surprising lack of even name recognition from others, including many people in the Bay Area. The school’s history of modest understatement has also fostered a residual sense that promotion and recognition are unnecessary and perhaps even a bit unseemly. The school and its accomplishments are noteworthy. It is time for College Prep to invest resources and energy into making sure that our story is heard and understood by the Bay Area community and our prospective students and their families.

One of the best and most appropriate ways for College Prep to enhance its visibility is to increase our positive presence in our neighborhood and the broader community. As ever, our students are our greatest representatives; where appropriate, we will continue to build both service-oriented and educational partnerships within Oakland and with peer national and international partners. Our graduates are also wonderful ambassadors for our school as the living expression of our mission and a powerful network for each other and our students.

At just over fifty years old, our school has reached the age where a number of its alumni have matured into the later stages of their careers. Many of our alumni are now in a position to help the school in significant ways, but this is not necessarily the behavior that was modeled for them when they were students. As is true for many relatively young schools, our philanthropic model has traditionally relied heavily on current parents, many of whom stepped away from Prep upon the graduation of their children. In order to meet the school’s current and future needs, we must forge and strengthen lifelong relationships with our alumni and past parents, making the case for their continued support and building our capacity to bring necessary resources to the school.

Of course, the significance of our presence should extend beyond the resources we are able to bring into our school, and be demonstrated through the knowledge and experience we send out into the world. When George Lucas’s education foundation chose to feature College Prep on its website Edutopia, it was highlighting our school as an educational leader. The responsibility to engage in a larger conversation about educational access, effectiveness, and excellence is an obligation that we are well positioned to embrace.

Strengthening our Presence
A. Clarify key messages and develop more effective communications channels through which the School can tell its story.
B. Cultivate a select number of partnerships that enhance our educational offerings and improve our visibility at the regional and national level.
C. Encourage faculty and staff to seek opportunities for leadership and service in regional and national organizations and forums.
D. Cultivate new and maintain strong existing relationships with colleges, continuing to seek opportunities to be visible and lead nationally.

Building Capacity and Support
E. Engage our parent and alumni networks in developing learning opportunities (internships, etc.) for our students.
F. Deepen our capacity to establish and cultivate relationships with prospective supporters of the school.
G. Develop a long-term neighbor relations plan

OUR SHARED WORK
As we move forward with this Strategic Plan, we recall the sage counsel of an alumnus and former trustee who encouraged our work with the Latin injunction: “Festina lente”—“Make haste slowly!” And so we will, because we believe in the importance of sustaining this extraordinary school, even in the face of the ongoing commitment of resources and care that our model requires. We will undoubtedly refine our vision as we go, ever deepening our understanding of what students need and our mission demands.

Though there is much work to be done, we are called anew by our school’s mission and character and by the inspiring possibilities for College Prep’s future.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The Board of Trustees and the Strategic Planning Steering Committee acknowledges the many members of our community whose dedication to and care for College Prep both deepened and energized our planning process.

Strategic Planning Steering Committee
Marc Sugiyama ’84, Chair and Trustee
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Monique DeVane, Head of School
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Blending our Unique Pedagogical Strengths with 21st Century Education Trends
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What Sustains Us (Part 2):
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