

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE, REVISITED

FIVE YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE OUR LAST STRATEGIC PLAN

In the very first issue of Great Beginnings (Fall 2009), Lisa Kohl—former teacher, parent and Board member—described the beginning of our then-upcoming efforts to update our Strategic Plan. That was followed, in the Fall 2011 issue, with an overview of the 2010-2015 plan approved by the Board earlier that year.

As you will see on the next page, we made rapid and impressive progress against our 2010 goals: exceeding expectations in most cases, implementing programmatic and physical changes, exploring certain options and making appropriate decisions to pursue or not various opportunities.

Now it's time to start the process all over again!

The Board has engaged Mary Ellen Kordas, who has over 40 years experience in Montessori education and served on the American Montessori Society (AMS) Board of Trustees, and Robyn Breiman, a current member of the AMS Board with almost 40 years as a Montessori consultant and educator, to facilitate the effort. The kick-off included an evening meeting on October 19 involving a broad spectrum of the community to assess the school's mission and philosophy; a similar all-day gathering will take place on December 5. With participation by members of the administration and faculty,

current and alumni parents and others, the goal is to have the plan approved at the December Board meeting.

But this is only the beginning of this year's activities.

TEN YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE THE LAST RE-ACCREDITATION

Simultaneous with the exploration of our aspirations for the future, we are also undergoing our decennial re-accreditation by the American Montessori Society (AMS) and the New York State Association of Independent School (NYSAIS). When the re-accreditation analysis was last performed in 2006, we knew change was on the way: former head, Marlene Barron, had announced her intention to retire. The five-year review in 2011 acknowledged our accomplishment of a successful transition to new leadership by Mimi Basso, and lauded the school for significant progress against the few areas identified for review.

The re-accreditation process entails detailed review of every aspect of school operations, and will require the participation and support of every constituency. Every teacher and administrator will serve on at least one subcommittee; many will have multiple responsibilities. NYSAIS and AMS are mutually supportive: NYSAIS will accept the AMS materials for the academic piece; AMS will accept the NYSAIS materials for the balance. The final document is limited to 125



pages(!), not counting the hundreds (literally) of supporting documents that will be available in the cloud. All this must be accomplished by May 2016. In the fall, the review team, composed of 4 or 5 individuals from other schools, will be on site to meet with administrators, faculty, Board members, and parents; to visit classrooms and explore our facilities; to confirm that our analysis is consistent with their observations.

2010-2015 STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

GOAL 1: To improve the life of the child in the classroom and beyond WSMS.

What we did:

- Implemented curricula to help children learn and practice empathy and responsibility, including community service
- Enhanced faculty responsiveness to children's emotional needs through work with visiting scholars from Bank Street's Center for Emotionally Responsive Practice
- Supported faculty re-structuring of the classrooms
- Upgraded the gym and rooftop equipment
- Re-purposed the Parents Room as a multi-use library/meeting place
- Renovated the gym to provide meeting and storage space, and replaced windows
- Reviewed food and nutrition policies, focused on healthy eating; adopted recommendations of consultants
- Instituted comprehensive security protocols, and ensured that all employees are well-versed in them
- Revised protocols for parent-teacher conferences to better address children's progress and parental understanding

GOAL 2: To sustain our faculty culture of excellence and growth.

What we did:

- Implemented programmatic enhancements derived from expanded professional development opportunities for faculty and administrators
- Continued Visiting Scholar Program, with specialists in areas including emotional needs, nutrition, assessment for outplacement, art and music
- Expanded opportunities for faculty to share expertise both in-house (team teaching and peer coaching), and with the educational community in workshops and conferences
- Established monthly faculty meetings, held in the evening, focused on topics related to teaching and best practices in the classroom
- Reviewed compensation program—and continue to do so annually—to ensure faculty are paid within the top quartile of peer schools; implemented salary banding and generous benefits including health care, pension and tuition reimbursement



- Developed and implemented revised curriculum for After Lunch Bunch (ALB)

GOAL 3: Improve the school's readiness for potential opportunities and challenges. Identify and proactively evaluate compelling, mission-consistent expansion opportunities that will enhance the quality of our program, maintain or strengthen our marketplace position, and/or enhance our financial security.

What we did:

- Expanded Teacher Education Program (WSMS-TEP), in both number of faculty/students and opportunities (Montessori Infant-Toddler option, Concordia College master's degree...)
- Established permanent Twos Program after success of pilot in 2013-2015
- Identified options for future review including: expanded summer camp, adult programming, nursery care for faculty and administrators, on-site therapeutic services

GOAL 4: To further increase financial security and flexibility in keeping with our mission of social, economic and cultural diversity, while maintaining our education excellence.

What we did:

- Implemented recommendations of consultant re: business office policies and procedures
- Continued outreach to alumni families, grandparents and friends to enhance fundraising opportunities
- Established the Founders Fund for Financial Aid, the school's first ever Board-designated endowed fund
- Maintained focus on financial aid as the beneficiary of the annual benefit, and successfully implemented "paddle raise" concept
- Realized continuing financial benefits of expanded TEP program
- Reviewed—and continue to do so regularly—financial policies, including investment, endowment, and use of reserves
- Investigated real estate opportunities in the neighborhood which could provide potential for expansion of early childhood and TEP programs, and continue to be aware of possibilities
- Remain proactive about the physical maintenance of 309 West 92nd Street building