



STRATEGIC PLAN

2014 - 2018

EXCELLENCE WITH JOY

MISSION

Atrium School's Pre-K to 8th grade progressive education encourages academic curiosity, creativity and exploration while fostering each child's intellectual growth. Our students develop confidence in themselves and respect for others within a joyful, vibrant community of nurturing teachers, engaged parents and enriching partnerships.



Letter From the Board Chair & Head of School

Dear Atrium Community,

This is an exciting time for Atrium School with a beautiful expanded space, a successful launch of our middle school curriculum and increased enrollment. With this excitement, comes a desire for future strategic thinking. It is with great pride and a firm belief in the future of Atrium School that we present our Strategic Plan for 2014-2018.

We would like to thank the Strategic Planning Committee for their hard work and dedication over the past year and a half helping us get to this point. The committee ensured that we engaged the whole Atrium community of current and alumni parents, faculty, staff and current and past Trustees.

Our Strategic Plan centers on the primary goal:
TO STAY TRUE TO OUR VISION AND MISSION AS WE EXPAND THE SCHOOL, CREATING EXCELLENCE THROUGHOUT.

Our plan focuses on the following five areas:
Program, Faculty, Enrollment, Communications, Sustainability

The board of trustees voted unanimously to adopt this Strategic Plan. Our Strategic Plan is a thoughtful reflection of our past and a roadmap to a successful future. This plan will be a guiding force for our Trustees, our Head of School and the entire Atrium community.

We look forward as a community to realizing our plan and the school's continued success.

Silvia Nersessian
Board Chair

Linda Echt
Head of School

“Atrium is an immensely welcoming and warm community that lives its mission.”

—Atrium faculty/staff member



“Atrium has a wonderful reputation and program. With the addition of 7th and 8th grades the school has the opportunity to strengthen our reputation and attract an even more diverse community.”

—Atrium staff member

“Atrium turns out self-aware young people who take responsibility for their learning and are able and comfortable to advocate for themselves.”

—past parent & board member



BACKGROUND

In the early 1980s, Cambridge-based educator Ginny Kahn envisioned a school where children are nurtured, valued, and challenged: nurtured as individual, creative learners, valued as thoughtful, constructive members of a warm and loving community, and challenged to achieve their fullest potential as they grow and change. She envisioned the Atrium School, an educational community in which we are all encouraged to “wonder, explore, invent, imagine, develop skills, and persevere at challenging work.” With Bruce Droste, as founding Director, working together with Atrium families, teachers, and friends, he and Ginny developed the school in Watertown, Massachusetts.

At the center of an Atrium education is the belief that early educational experiences set young people on a path for life. Atrium carefully cultivates each child’s love of learning, confidence in his or her own ideas and abilities, respect for others and the environment, and engagement as a citizen of the world. Following a progressive education model, Atrium nurtures the social development of children as much as their cognitive and academic growth. Coupled with this is the belief that when Atrium accepts a child they also accept their whole family, from the smallest sibling to the eldest members. Atrium is a community of people committed to lifelong learning and openness to new experiences and endeavors at all ages.

Originally, Atrium ended in sixth grade which meant students had to transition to new schools at a critical time in their social, emotional, and educational development. Thirty years after its founding the school began exploring the question of whether or not Atrium students would benefit from attending the school through middle school. The prevailing opinion was “Yes”, and the current Atrium Board of Trustees made the strategic decision to extend the school from Pre-K through 6th to Pre-K through 8th grade.

The Board realized that adding a middle school would have a positive impact on the school as a whole. The decision created an opportunity to look at the school holistically, ensuring that there is cohesion throughout the program and that excellence is maintained at all levels. Having made the overarching decision to expand the school, it became apparent that the school needed a formal strategic plan to guide it through the expansion and beyond. The plan would serve as a road map to assure that Atrium stayed true to its mission and culture, built a solid infrastructure to support the program, and provided a sustainable financial model for the future.

PROCESS

To address the school’s growing needs, the Atrium Board of Trustees embarked on a strategic planning process. They formed a strategic planning committee and hired Amy Cahners and Susan Donahue of Cahners & Donahue Associates LLC to guide the planning process.

With the help of the consultants, the strategic planning committee conducted a survey of the Board as well as select past board members, parents, faculty and staff to understand the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities facing the school in light of the decision to expand.

The first step in the process was a review of the mission statement which took place during a half day retreat and included Ginny Kahn, board members, past board members, faculty, staff, parents, and alumni parents. The mission statement was reviewed and it was agreed that the mission statement should be revised. A mission review task force was created to draft a new mission statement. The Board and strategic planning committee, held a full day retreat in March 2014 to agree on a revised mission statement and define the overarching goals and strategies for the strategic plan.

Following the retreat there were focus group meetings to further articulate the strategies and action steps necessary to achieve the goals agreed upon at the strategic planning retreat.

The Board envisions this to be a roadmap that guides the growth and development of Atrium for the next four years while at the same time reinforcing Atrium’s commitment to progressive education and honoring its values and community.

GOALS

With the addition of a middle school as the major impetus for this plan, one overarching goal was articulated.

STAY TRUE TO OUR VISION AND MISSION AS WE EXPAND THE SCHOOL, CREATING EXCELLENCE THROUGHOUT.

To support this overarching goal, five goals were developed to be accomplished over the next four years.

1

PROGRAM

Strengthen and expand our academic program assuring that our children are nurtured, valued, and challenged.

2

FACULTY

Attract, retain, and support a talented faculty committed to the educational and community values of the school.

3

ENROLLMENT

Reach and maintain full enrollment and honor our commitment to diversity, incrementally growing enrollment.

4

COMMUNICATIONS

Communicate our educational mission to a broader community thereby providing a clear and compelling school choice.

5

SUSTAINABILITY

Secure sufficient resources to realize the mission.

1. PROGRAM

Atrium's program is at the core of all that it does. The school's expansion necessitated that immediate attention be given to creating a middle school curriculum and program that holds true to the hallmarks of an Atrium education. Developing the middle school program will further enrich the program for all students.

STRATEGIES

- Hire a Director of Curriculum and Learning to oversee curriculum development, integration, and execution and provide supervision and support to the faculty.
- Concentrate efforts and resources around specific areas of curriculum development and teaching practices.
- Expand the athletic program across all grades in developmentally appropriate ways.
- Build and implement a middle school program which engages our students and extends their learning.
- Deepen and enhance the social-emotional health curriculum and services.
- Ensure that there is adequate and appropriate technology to support the curriculum.
- Identify and establish relationships with new partners in the greater community.

2. FACULTY

If Atrium's program is at the core of what we do then the faculty are at the heart of who we are. They are passionate and dedicated to their work and the children and families who they interact with in their classrooms and throughout the school. Every day the faculty demonstrates their commitment to Atrium and through their teaching brings its mission to life. It is important that the school match this commitment by providing a work environment that encourages and supports the faculty's growth and development. In doing so we ensure that Atrium retains and attracts strong educators who continually inspire our children in the classroom as well as contribute to the school's long term success.

STRATEGIES

- Develop and execute a robust professional development program for both individual faculty members and the faculty body which provides a wide range of opportunities for the faculty to learn, grow, and collaborate.
- Support the faculty's growth and development by enhancing supervision and providing systematic evaluation.
- Create and implement a competitive salary scale and benefits package.
- Expand faculty recruitment and clearly define the hiring process and timeline.

3. ENROLLMENT

Atrium's community is an essential element of the Atrium experience. A strong enrollment and a diverse student population ensure a robust community where everyone, most importantly the students, can thrive. Secondly, but equally important, is the reality that a fully enrolled school provides financial stability allowing Atrium the opportunity to expand, enrich its program, and create a sustainable infrastructure for the future.

STRATEGIES

- Enrollment Goals—112 students in FY 2015, 135 students in FY 2016, 160 students in FY 2017, and 185 students in FY 2018.
- Increase the number of qualified applicants, particularly in the 3 major entry points of Pre-K, K, and 6th grade.
- Increase the yield on applications (the number of families accepting Atrium's offer of admission) to 45%.
- Increase diversity, particularly racial diversity, within the student population.
- Reassess and strengthen the admissions process.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

Atrium has been perfecting its progressive education model for the last thirty years and has developed pedagogy and best practices that could be shared with the educational community and other external groups. Increased visibility and strong messaging are needed to put Atrium front and center as a leader in progressive education and a first choice for families and teachers who want to experience Atrium's outstanding program and community.

STRATEGIES

- Articulate Atrium's unique story, mission, and pedagogy for our key audiences: current and prospective families, current and prospective teachers, alumni, alumni parents, and trustees.
- Become well known and recognized by a broader community.
- Raise the profile and reputation of Atrium in the Greater Boston area, making Atrium a nexus for education and community and a "first choice" school for both teachers and families seeking a progressive education for their children.

5. SUSTAINABILITY

The School's sustainability is predicated on having the revenue to support an expanded school, an outstanding program, and excellent faculty and staff. Increasing both the total tuition income and fundraising are critical to achieving this strategic plan. In addition, securing a permanent home for the School will allow the Board to plan for the long term future of Atrium.

STRATEGIES

- Refine the budget process to allow for better planning and to determine the best allocation of our resources.
- Increase our development efforts to support the operating budget.
- Purchase the building within the next six years.

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