BE BOLD. BE STRONG. BE ENGAGED.

Our Strategic Vision

The Philadelphia School
"You cannot teach today the same way you did yesterday to prepare students for tomorrow."

- John Dewey
Our Mission

The Philadelphia School educates children for a future that is impossible to know but not impossible to shape.

Learn Here. Go Anywhere.

Since our founding in 1972, The Philadelphia School has grown in size, complexity, and diversity. This growth has been rooted firmly in the progressive values with which our founders began: immersive learning, responsive teaching, and purposeful engagement with the world.

Today our school hums with vibrant activity. TPS students are dreamers, designers, builders, and questioners. They aren’t waiting around for life to begin. They co-create their education and their communities right here, right now.

In turn, adults, in and out of the classroom, guide the work deliberately and compassionately, modeling the permanent place in life for curious, exuberant growth.
1. What if questions were more important than answers?

2. What if kids owned their own education?

3. What if kids learned inside, outside, and all around?

4. What if every kid accepted the differences of others and the need to make a difference?
And what if student questions were more important than those of teachers? At The Philadelphia School we ask kids to ask questions. We challenge them to challenge themselves. Each other. Convention. We approach learning through inquiry — with projects and community designed to provide the context and experiences to expand, develop, and stimulate a student’s thinking, understanding, and passion for knowledge.

**OUR VISION:** Our commitment to inquiry-based exploration will continue to drive us, both in and out of the classroom. That TPS ethos led us to push the boundaries of the strategic planning process — by examining, exploring and questioning (and questioning again) — our very understanding of our role in an ever-changing world. Curiosity guided our thinking, spurred us on creatively, and informed our ongoing vision of the future.

“**I remember being encouraged to ask questions — lots of questions. Sometimes my line of questioning took class discussions far from the topic at hand — but that was okay (most of the time!). At TPS, student questions advanced our learning in meaningful and exciting ways.”**

— Ben ’93 (public defender)
WHAT IF KIDS OWNED THEIR OWN EDUCATION?

At TPS, it’s about active participation and co-creation of learning experiences, for example, drafting classroom constitutions collectively — all the way from preschool through 8th grade. Kindergarteners advocate for their science study topic (should we study mushrooms? or bees? or mice?), 3rd graders write their own plays about making a more fair USA, and middle schoolers create and teach mini-courses devoted to areas of passion (Harry Potter, Introduction to Filmmaking, and Mock Trial).

OUR VISION: Student-driven learning will continue to happen through an interdisciplinary curriculum that fosters innovation and positive risk-taking.

“This school has taught me to love learning — to love the flow of information to my brain and the gasp when suddenly something makes so much more sense to me. Our teachers allow us to take the final steps toward understanding, to make our own music, and to find our own creative inspiration.”

– Natalia ’16
WHAT IF KIDS LEARNED INSIDE, OUTSIDE, AND ALL AROUND?

It’s hard to participate fully in life and education when confined to the four walls of a classroom. We believe that an environment devoid of barriers is the single best setting to unleash young minds. The city’s sidewalks, museums, historical sites, and theaters are natural extensions of our classrooms. At our country campus, students see science as part of the world around them — not as a series of classroom experiments from a textbook. And curriculum is enriched by trips to New York City, Baltimore, Washington, and abroad.

OUR VISION: The school we envision will continue to push outward to add layers of meaning, matter, and context that can never come from formulas, whiteboards, or books alone. Wherever they are, our students will be deeply absorbed in what they’re doing.

“The country classroom made me a curious kid. I was encouraged to dig in the dirt, turn over rocks in the stream, and to pick up worms. The country classroom fostered skills in being observant and thinking scientifically, yet most importantly, especially for kids in today’s world, it made me respectful and appreciative of our natural environment.”

–Megan ’04 (surgical resident)
4 WHAT IF EVERY KID ACCEPTED THE DIFFERENCES OF OTHERS AND THE NEED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

What does it mean for our school, our teachers, and our kids that we embrace difference — whether it be of race, gender, sexuality, or even opinion, style or way of learning? We want our children to find their place and their voice. Only then are they truly free to explore, discover, grow, and be as accepting, challenging, and encouraging of others as they are of themselves.

OUR VISION: We reaffirm our commitment to diversity in our everyday interactions, continuing to instill it into our curriculum and institutional culture and to provide the resources and support necessary to encourage the fullest participation of every individual in our school’s family. And we are resolved to take our commitment to diversity beyond that family, by both studying and serving our neighborhoods, our city, and our nation. We know we can’t afford complacency or isolation. TPS will be a space that is at once inclusive, questioning, curious, empathetic, coalitional, and socially transformative.

“It’s not enough to simply recognize differences. We must work as a community to embrace them. I’m not sure what that looks like exactly, but I imagine a place where my students can be their authentic selves.”

– Bartley Jeannoute, TPS teacher
What will it take to help our kids be ready today to shape a world that is impossible to know?

The future will find us deepening our commitments to experience-based learning and to equity, diversity, sustainability, and community. We want TPS to be a school without defaults. It will be a space defined and enhanced by the diversity within. Just safe enough to be brave, the school we envision will be increasingly outward facing, less container than catapult. You’ll encounter our students pursuing projects out in the world with partners from other schools, other life paths, and other generations. Wherever they are, they’ll be absorbed in what they’re doing, hands on, hearts open.

Our Strategic Imperatives:

BE BOLD. BE STRONG. BE ENGAGED.
Elevate student voice, choice, and agency in the classroom, in the community, and in the world. Dedicate resources, develop program, and design structures that recognize and elevate our faculty as national leaders in progressive education. Embolden equitable and inclusive practices throughout our curriculum, community, and culture as foundational elements of our identity. Deepen diversity within our student body, faculty, staff, leadership, and board. Explore the prospect of becoming a non-majority school. Grow The Philadelphia School Fund to at least $1M per year and our endowment to $25M as we approach our 50th Anniversary. Challenge our assumptions of time, space, and program; construct a sustainable financial model that is responsive to a dynamic and changing environment.

BE BOLD.

Lead and adapt to innovations in progressive education. Be a brave, safe, and equitable space. Pioneer new financial models.

OUR GOALS

STRATEGIES
Enhance our essential practices, core values, and pedagogy. 
Recruit, support, and mentor outstanding educators. 
Ensure financial stability and sustainability.

**BE STRONG.**

**OUR GOALS**

**STRATEGIES**

Strengthen teaching and learning that is experiential, relational, democratic, and forward looking.

Compensate, educate, and mentor outstanding educators.

Define and clearly articulate the distinctive qualities and impact of a TPS education.

Align and communicate all TPS practices, policies, and culture to ensure they include and respond to all constituencies.

Innovate sustainable systems and spaces to support our size, culture, and program.

Grow and strengthen our financial resources through alternative sources of income, fundraising, expense infrastructure, and tuition strategy.
BE ENGAGED.

OUR GOALS

Stretch students through service learning and self-guided research. Expand our role as a community of activist learners. Build partnerships to enhance program and expand revenue streams.

STRATEGIES

Integrate a service learning arc for students to become genuine partners with agency in classrooms, communities, and cultures.

Increase our connectedness with the Greater Philadelphia community by establishing, maintaining, and maximizing well-aligned, reciprocal community partnerships.

Define and elevate our place in the shared future of urban education through public, private, and charter partnerships.

Build on the city, country, classroom philosophy to enhance place-based learning as a cornerstone of our program.

Design opportunities for internal engagement of students and alumni across constituent groups.

Focus on partnerships that fortify revenue streams and deepen our connection to diverse communities.
MANY THANKS TO:

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We are deeply grateful for the contributions of hundreds of stakeholders, including faculty/staff, students, parents, grandparents, alumni, and thought leaders, who provided in input via surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Photo credits: Thank you to the faculty, staff, and parents whose photographs are featured in this publication.
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