

HACKLEY SCHOOL



Redefining Excellence: Learning Beyond Boundaries

A Strategic Plan for Hackley School

Redefining Excellence

Hackley is an exceptional school. With a strong and distinct school culture, Hackley places great value on character and on relationships formed on the Hilltop. The faculty is passionate, talented, and dedicated to their students and the school. The campus is beautiful, enrollment strong, and the community is generous in all forms of their support. In light of these strengths and numerous others, why does Hackley need a strategic plan? A Hackley education must constantly evolve to meet and anticipate the demands of a constantly changing world. Simply put, learning—as individuals and as an institution—should know no boundaries.

Hackley has now admitted and enrolled the first classes of the 2030s. While it is hard to imagine dates so distant, one only has to look at these students as they walk our halls each day to know that their time on the Hilltop will come to an end sooner than we realize. To ensure that we are maximizing learning for current students and those who will follow, Hackley must engage in—and in places lead—important conversations about what it means to educate, to be educated, and to be a school.

Although teaching and learning have changed immeasurably since Frances Hackley founded the school in 1899, many timeless competencies, areas of knowledge, and experiences are as important today as they were then. Teaching

students to communicate clearly, to think deeply, to master difficult subjects and skills, and to work together are—and will remain—hallmarks of a Hackley education, whether taught in the classroom, the studio, or through athletics. We affirm the importance and strength of these programs, while also recognizing and embracing the dynamic context in which today's students are educated, a context that is markedly different than it was for those who came before them. In a world that is more interconnected, more complex, and evolving more quickly than ever before, students require an education that provides them with tools new and old to thrive, adapt, and make a positive impact in their community and beyond.



“Redefining Excellence: Learning Beyond Boundaries” is Hackley’s contribution to the national conversation on the changing nature and future of education. Our plan contains four major strategic priorities:

- 1. Redefine a Liberal Arts Education:** articulate and broaden the curriculum in terms of competencies and experiences to meet the needs of tomorrow’s learners and citizens.
- 2. Promote the Hilltop as a Learning Hub:** increase learning opportunities for students beyond the boundaries of disciplines, classroom, and campus, and serve as an educational leader and incubator to push the boundaries of existing programs.
- 3. Build for the Future:** promote lifelong professional learning within Hackley’s faculty and assume a leadership role in cultivating the next generation of independent school educators.
- 4. Nurture a Culture of Wellness:** establish wellness—both at the student and institutional levels—as cornerstones of a healthy learning environment and school community.

Embedded throughout these strategic priorities are signature programs that will shape Hackley’s future. They include (i) developing an approach to K-12 curricula that centers on enduring and emerging competencies, (ii) elevating creative expression in all its forms and improving our performing, visual, and digital arts programs and facilities, (iii) integrating service work and Service Learning, including developing a sustainable model for Hudson Scholars,

(iv) creating culturally immersive opportunities for students domestic and international, (v) integrating the Hackley Forest and surrounding natural ecosystems into our program, (vi) creating a series of culminating “Big Experiences” at important transition points for students, (vii) affirming our national leadership in teaching excellence, and (viii) fostering a culture of individual and institutional wellness.

“Redefining Excellence” was conceived to provide Hackley students and faculty with the tools, experiences, and learning environment necessary to cultivate the habits of “character, scholarship, and accomplishment” defined in the Portrait of a Graduate. And by virtue of our history and current strengths, Hackley is poised and ready for the educational vision expressed by this plan. Like the school it describes, “Redefining Excellence” will be an active and vibrant conversation, and its implementation will be as dynamic as the ideas it contains. Together, we will create an approach to learning that transcends boundaries, further strengthening a Hackley education and its enduring value in the lives of our students.

Go forth!

Michael C. Wirtz
HEAD OF SCHOOL



Background and Context

During the 2017-2018 academic year and under the direction of the Board of Trustees, Hackley School launched a comprehensive strategic planning process. The strategic plan, “Redefining Excellence,” was developed to provide a long-range view of future school priorities and was created through a highly inclusive and participatory process. A steering committee was formed and focused on research, environmental scans, SWOT analysis, committee exercises, and trends in the independent school and the education sectors. The school community—parents, students, faculty and staff, alumni, and trustees—offered their thoughts on priorities for the future through surveys conducted at the outset of the process. As the work unfolded, the community received monthly updates on the process.

To build a base of sound information and to guide the planning process, the school enlisted the assistance of a research and planning firm, Ian Symmonds & Associates (ISA). ISA invested time and effort to learn about Hackley through a comprehensive research effort that included stakeholder surveys, competitive and educational landscape analysis, market segmentation, and demographic trends. This information laid the foundation for sound assumptions about the future.

The strategic planning steering committee worked collaboratively through a series of exercises designed to establish priorities based upon the research findings. This process culminated in the

summer of 2018, with the steering committee developing a small set of priorities for future focus. With input from a series of representative working groups, the steering committee expanded upon emerging priorities to outline specific initiatives, action plans, and a final series of sequenced priorities.

Each strategic goal contains several initiatives and numerous action plans. While not elaborated upon within this document, additional implementation details, such as costs and metrics of success, will continue to be developed and refined throughout the implementation process.





Hackley's Mission

Hackley challenges students to grow in character, scholarship, and accomplishment, to offer unreserved effort, and to learn from the varying perspectives and backgrounds in our community and the world.

PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE

A HACKLEY EDUCATION...

Cultivates habits of character that help students choose to:

- Treat others with respect, honesty, and generosity in thought, word, and action
- Act with humility, integrity, and a sense of responsibility toward the greater good
- Respect and strive to understand varying backgrounds and perspectives, fostering empathy, friendships, and community

Creates habits of scholarship that lead students to:

- Experience joy in learning while navigating the challenges and failures that are integral to growth
- Explore the breadth of their intellectual curiosity, stimulate their creativity, and pursue meaningful questions
- Communicate ideas, arguments, and analysis clearly and persuasively
- Collaborate to sharpen thinking and broaden perspectives

Elevates students to form habits of accomplishment, uniting character and scholarship to:

- Demonstrate the personal courage to attempt new things, the intellectual courage to consider new ideas, and the moral courage to stand for matters of principle
- Create a sense of purpose, orienting talent, service, and actions to transcend individual success
- Reinforce the immeasurable value of a life marked by friendship, balance, and joy.



I. Redefine a Liberal Arts Education

Articulate and broaden the curriculum in terms of competencies and experiences to meet the needs of tomorrow's learners and citizens.



Orient the Hackley program towards enduring competencies in areas of “character, scholarship, and accomplishment.”

By marrying the development of timeless academic and personal skills (e.g. oral and written communication, research, critical thinking, teamwork) with the generation of curriculum that cultivates emerging competencies (e.g. creative expression, systems thinking, data fluency, scientific and mathematical literacies), Hackley’s program will continue evolving to serve the future needs of our students.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Identify and ensure the continued emphasis of enduring knowledge and skills throughout the curriculum.
2. Develop emerging competencies aligning with the Portrait of a Graduate.

Create opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary teaching and learning.

Interesting and complex problems and questions often lie at the intersection of disciplinary boundaries. While continuing to develop deep discipline-based knowledge, Hackley will expand curricular offerings across academic boundaries to better prepare students for a life of continuous learning.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Explore real world project-based learning K-12 to create formative interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary experiences throughout the curriculum.
2. Prioritize the development of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary courses in the Upper School.
3. Identify the time and resources needed for additional interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary collaborations, including those supported by distinctive course models (e.g. trimester, pass/fail, “J-Term”).

Develop research centers within and across disciplinary boundaries, based on the multi-year model of Hackley’s Independent Research Program.

Expanding on the Science Department’s Independent Research Program, Hackley will develop opportunities for Upper School students to pursue research in other disciplines with support from Hackley faculty and other experts. This approach strengthens the curriculum while developing independence and promoting academic scholarship.



SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Develop a network of mentors/experts to help students see research projects to fruition.
2. Identify opportunities to create research centers in additional disciplines informed by student interest.

Deepen Hackley’s focus on students’ local, national, and international responsibilities.

Hackley will develop a student’s sense of responsibilities as a member of a democratic society and integrate these into the K-12 curricula. Through experience-based opportunities including service, travel, and engagement with local government, Hackley seeks to teach and cultivate a sense of civic and global responsibility independent of political views.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Create a comprehensive approach devoted to civic and global responsibility in alignment with Hackley’s mission.
2. Enhance K-12 engagement in political and social discourse to help students learn and practice communication skills across differing viewpoints and perspectives.

Examine and reframe assessment practices to best support desired learning competencies and experiences.

Through a holistic examination of assessment practices, faculty will consider and implement additional modes of assessment (e.g. project-based learning, portfolios) to reinforce curricular competencies and encourage deep learning.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Identify in-house best practices and create dedicated time for faculty to learn from each other.
2. Research best practices and trends in assessment, examining the link between mastery, depth, wellness, and assessment.



II. Promote the Hilltop as a Learning Hub

Increase learning opportunities beyond the boundaries of disciplines, classroom, and campus, and serve as an educational leader and incubator to push the boundaries of existing programs.

Elevate forms of creative expression and the creative arts—visual, performing, and digital—to engage Hackley students and link them with the broader creative community.

Creativity and creative expression will be elevated by bringing the visual, performing, and digital arts programs together in a new facility that promotes collaboration across disciplinary boundaries. Hackley students and faculty will learn from and work with visiting artists and professional artists and artisans from the surrounding area, leveraging the vibrancy of the greater New York City area art community.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Reimagine the physical plant and human resource requirements necessary to inspire and elevate teaching and learning of the creative arts and the creative process.
2. Establish opportunities for students to collaborate with artists and artisans within and beyond the greater Hackley community.
3. Develop an artist-in-residence program.

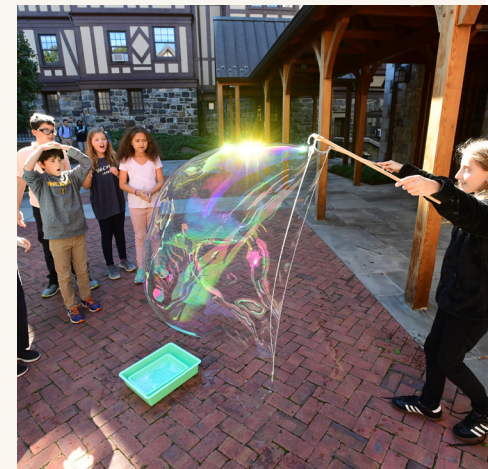


Create a series of culminating “Big Experiences” for Hackley students at important transition points.

Students and teachers across the K-12 spectrum will collaborate in developmentally appropriate ways to define and develop a series of culminating experiences at key transition points. These “Big Experiences” may range from year-long Service Learning projects in 4th grade to environmental stewardship work in 8th grade to travel and internships in the Upper School. “Big Experiences” will differ in length, depth, and complexity as would be appropriate across the divisions, yet will align with and reinforce the curricular competencies, serving as signature learning experiences at Hackley.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Identify and develop the vision for the “Big Experiences” program and its requirements, aligning them with the competency-based approach.
2. Analyze academic calendar and student schedules to allow for more flexibility to accommodate the “Big Experiences” program.
3. Create a collaborative process for students and teachers to design these experiences.
4. Explore varying methods of assessment and reporting for these experiences.



Expand present travel experiences to create opportunities for culturally immersive experiences domestic and abroad.

Each Hackley student will have the opportunity to participate in an immersive travel experience to a unique cultural environment, domestically or abroad, at least once between grades 9 and 12. Students will have the opportunity to share their learning with peers and promote the sense of empathy and wonder cultivated by travel.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Investigate existing programs abroad and leverage Round Square membership to create student and/or faculty exchanges for extended periods.
2. Identify and secure resources to ensure that each Hackley student can participate in an immersive travel experience to a unique cultural environment, domestic or abroad, at least once between grades 9 and 12.

Develop a school-wide Service Learning program and create a sustainable model for Hudson Scholars.

Service Learning—the blending of classroom-based learning and community service—will be expanded in developmentally appropriate ways. Additionally, we will develop the necessary structures to sustain Hudson Scholars, strengthening Hackley’s connection with the local community and reinforcing the centrality of service to others in a life of accomplishment.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Identify the structures and support required to build Hudson Scholars into a four-year program.
2. Cultivate an authentic and nuanced understanding of the concept of Service Learning as a teaching and learning strategy across all three divisions.
3. Engage current community partners to discuss the Service Learning framework, understand present and future needs of organizations, and identify the possible curricular connections for new opportunities.



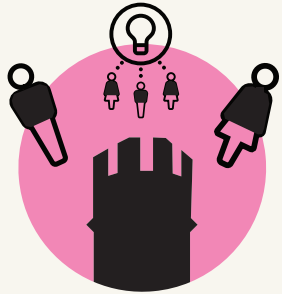
Utilize the Hackley Forest and surrounding natural ecosystems to their fullest educational capacities and foster environmental stewardship.

The community will steward and better integrate the Hackley Forest and surrounding natural environment into the program, including establishing professional development resources for other educators and developing relationships with partner schools.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Study the potential for the creation of the Hackley Institute for Forestry, Agriculture & Resource Management (Hackley FARM).
2. Connect and create a “friendship” program with schools that have proximity and developed programs focused on environmental education (e.g. the New York Harbor School).





III. Build for the Future

Promote lifelong professional learning within Hackley's faculty and assume a leadership role in cultivating the next generation of independent school educators.





Affirm Hackley as a national leader in teaching excellence.

Hackley will further a tradition of teaching excellence by recruiting, hiring, and retaining a diverse, talented, and passionate faculty. Exceptional faculty will be attracted to—and will remain at—Hackley through the strengthening of an environment that affirms the professionalism of teachers and encourages lifelong learning and the sharing of effective teaching and learning practices with colleagues and the larger community of educators.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Recruit, hire, and retain a faculty that advances Hackley's tradition of teaching excellence and mirrors the school's diverse student community.
2. Identify unique areas where Hackley can promote teaching excellence (e.g. STEM research, creative expression) to professionals beyond our campus.
3. Explore opportunities (e.g. summer professional development, institute models) to leverage Hackley's campus and location in promoting educational practices and programs to other educators.

Strengthen a culture of professional development and promote lifelong learning, creativity, and collaboration.

Hackley will prioritize collaboration and peer-to-peer learning to further develop faculty creativity and strengthen a culture of continuous professional learning. Time, support, and professional development resources will complement individualized professional growth plans for faculty.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Develop opportunities for ongoing, internally-led professional development during the school day, including pre- and post-school year sessions.
2. Partner with faculty to develop individualized professional growth plans that promote continuous growth and enrichment throughout the arc of a career.
3. Build out initiatives that encourage faculty to collaborate and model creative and innovative thinking, including iGrants, Ex Days, The Hackery (makerspace).



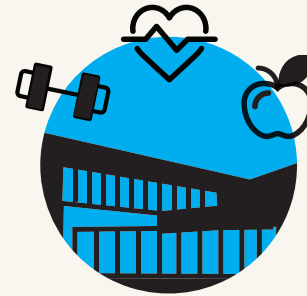
Develop networks and relationships beyond Hackley to enrich faculty professional growth and the student learning experience.

Leveraging Hackley's location, physical plant, and community network, Hackley will create opportunities for faculty to connect with other educators and professionals to facilitate the sharing of ideas and practices. Exploration of mentoring relationships, teacher exchange programs, and connections with regional graduate programs will deepen the professional learning environment of the school in support of student learning.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Build a mentoring model to connect teachers at Hackley with one another and explore expanding to area schools.
2. Develop relationships with regional graduate programs to establish Hackley as a center for practical experience and credentialing.
3. Explore short-term teacher-in-residence and teacher exchange opportunities for Hackley faculty to teach and learn in other environments and vice versa.





IV. Nurture a Culture of Wellness

Establish wellness—both at the student and institutional levels—as cornerstones of a healthy learning environment and school community.



Promote individual wellness throughout the Hackley community.

Mindful of connection between health and deep learning, Hackley will continue to promote wellness in all its dimensions: physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual. Throughout the athletics and academic programs, wellness competencies will be integrated to diminish unhealthy forms and causes of student stress and ensure the development of lifelong habits and understanding.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Identify and promote wellness practices that enrich the teaching and learning environment.
2. Identify opportunities to improve student and employee wellness as articulated by the community and highlighted in the Health and Wellness Audit.

Reimagine the rhythm and use of time within the school day and academic year to optimize student and faculty learning.

The academic schedule and calendar will be redesigned to better support the priorities of “Redefining Excellence,” including those approaches that require longer stretches of time.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Assess strengths and weaknesses of current daily schedules and academic calendar in light of priorities in “Redefining Excellence.”
2. Build community through creative use of time outside of the classroom and the construction of meeting times and necessary physical space.
3. Explore a unique learning period (e.g. expanded Ex Days, “J-Term”) to support additional experience-based learning opportunities.



Sustain the health of Hackley at the institutional level.

Hackley’s culture and values, including the emphasis on a diverse and inclusive community, remain central to the mission and health of the school. Continued careful stewardship and analysis of existing resources, a focus on growing the endowment and moderating the expenses, and the development of a long-term tuition strategy will ensure Hackley has the necessary resources to successfully implement “Redefining Excellence” and strengthen school culture and the sense of community.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

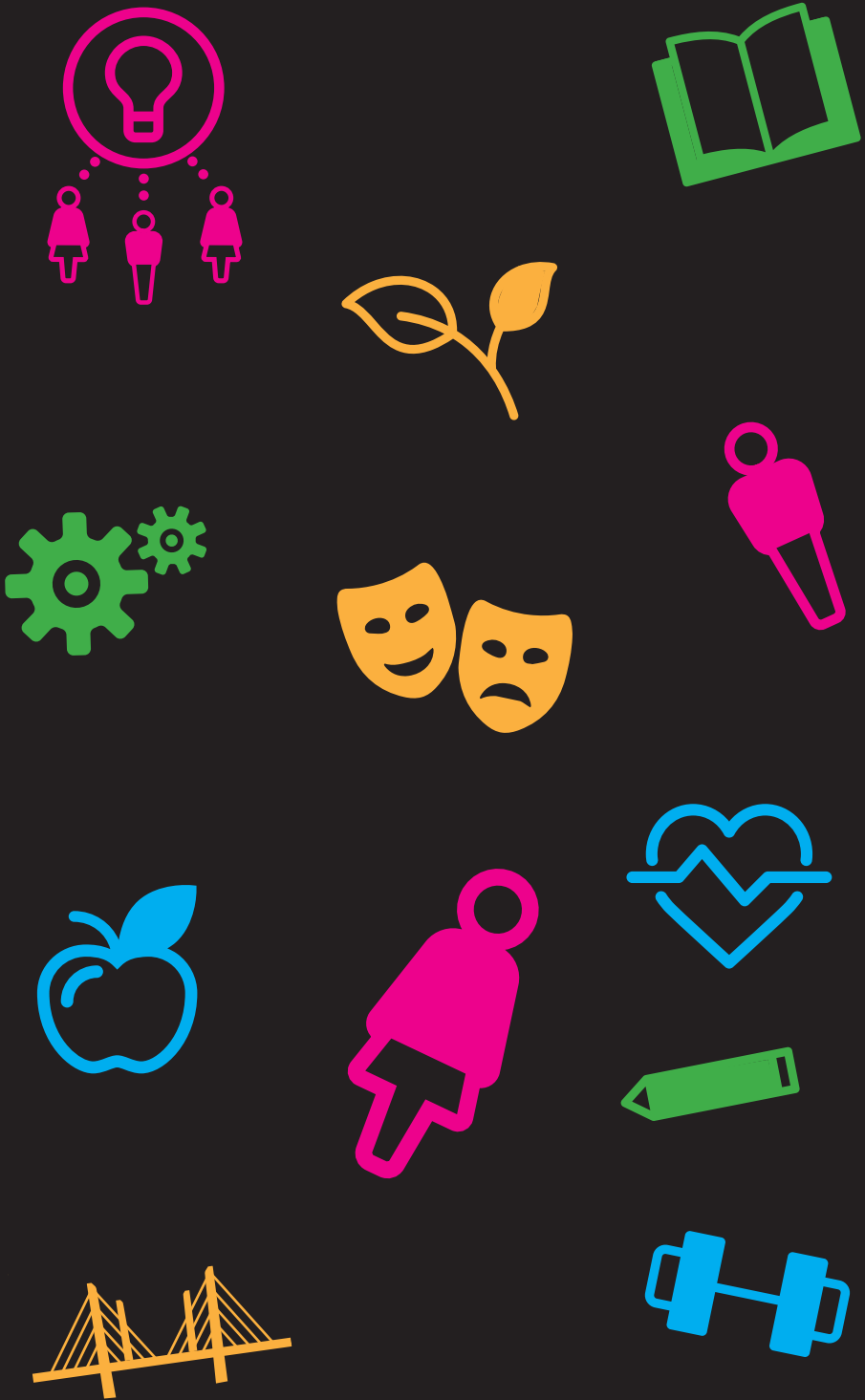
1. Preserve and protect Hackley’s unique school culture and values amidst implementation of “Redefining Excellence.”
2. Analyze school programs, services, physical plant, and organizational structure to ensure continued prudent financial management.
3. Increase the endowment to protect Hackley’s competitive position.
4. Develop long-term tuition model that supports full implementation of strategic initiatives and recognizes the centrality of socioeconomic diversity in Hackley’s culture.

Execute “Redefining Excellence” with boldness, transparency, and with a focus on the student learning experience.

Hackley will set concrete goals and measures of success for the plan and will regularly update the community on progress related to its implementation.

SELECTED ACTION STEPS:

1. Publish and promote “Redefining Excellence” to all Hackley constituencies and implement it with conviction and clarity.
2. Set concrete goals and metrics for progress, prioritizing student, parent, and faculty feedback.
3. Update “Redefining Excellence” annually and share progress with the community.



redefiningexcellence.hackleyschool.org

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