

A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR MERCERSBURG

"...the school's democratic spirit, residential school quality, sense of community, consistent self-examination, excellent and beautiful campus and physical plant..."

--Five qualities of Mercersburg Academy identified at the strategic planning retreat that Regents agreed must be sustained forever.

In implementing the 2000-2005 Strategic Plan, Mercersburg invested heavily in its faculty and staff, its educational programs, and its facilities. In a sense, all good plans follow that basic premise, for the most potent formula for success in a school is to place talented young people in the hands of inspired teachers and coaches in facilities that make for effective delivery of program. This plan stays true to that equation but also takes those component parts in some new and exciting directions. Thanks to courageous leadership and committed alumni and parents who continue to provide remarkable energy and resources, the school is positioned as strongly today as it has ever been. This current plan intends to build on that strength and momentum, with strategic goals that not only support the school's mission but also reinforce those enduring values articulated above.

MISSION

Mercersburg Academy prepares young men and women from diverse backgrounds for college and for life in a global community. Students at Mercersburg pursue a rigorous and dynamic curriculum while learning to live together harmoniously in a supportive residential environment. Mercersburg's talented faculty instill in students the value of hard work and the importance of character and community as they teach students to think for themselves, to approach life thoughtfully and creatively, to thrive physically, to act morally, to value the spiritual dimension of human existence, and to serve others.

BACKGROUND

The vision articulated in the 2000-2005 Strategic Plan resulted in an enormously successful capital campaign which brought significant additional resources to bear for Mercersburg and re-positioned the school in the marketplace. Since implementation of that plan, the school's admission pool has increased dramatically, and all available student spaces are filled with qualified young men and women. The total amount of financial aid offered to outstanding students has also grown considerably. Mercersburg's faculty have watched their salaries grow, their living quarters renovated, necessary technology being made readily available, and worthwhile academic programs emerge and flourish. New support services, such as a counselling department, a Writing Center, an Outdoor Education program, an International Coordinator, and a Learning Services

program, have supported students in important and meaningful ways. All dormitories on campus have been renovated, additional faculty houses have been purchased, and the new Burgin Center for the Arts is scheduled to open in the fall of 2006. The new Davenport Squash Center and Smoyer Tennis Center provide state-of-the-art facilities for our racquet sports. A campus master plan has guided the school's thinking in crucial ways as we have completed projects as far-ranging as new athletic practice fields to a central chilling plant to improved landscape architecture in various places across campus. The school's endowment has grown considerably, and annual giving has broken through the two million dollar barrier.

STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

While the school should be justifiably proud of its accomplishments throughout its entire history in general and as a result of the Strategic Plan for 2000-2005 in particular, it cannot be content to rest on those laurels; honest and thorough self-examination reveals much that still needs to be done. At a time when demographics are becoming less favorable for schools with such a strong boarding school quality as ours, we must continue to find and cultivate new markets to grow our applicant pool. Concurrently, with the cost of attending a private boarding school showing no signs of slowing, our egalitarian spirit makes it imperative that we increase our financial aid resources to a level where we do not lose talented students who want to attend Mercersburg but make other choices due to our not being able to meet demonstrated need. Looming teacher shortages are real, and we must do everything in our power to hire and retain a remarkable faculty and staff, especially as we consider salary levels, health insurance benefits, and professional development opportunities. Available and relevant technologies seem to change by the hour, and we must be ready to make smart decisions about their use. Current national political and civic discourse is such that a residential community and programs aimed at understanding the responsibilities attached to creating a healthy, civil society seem more critical than ever. The world has become a smaller, yet more complicated place, characterized by enormous political and economic interdependence and opportunity. We need to continue to invest in our physical plant by renovating and creating new spaces which will allow us to deliver fully the programs envisioned in this plan, while simultaneously being responsible stewards of our environment. The strategic challenges are plentiful, but Mercersburg believes and teaches that life's greatest rewards are to be found in surmounting its greatest challenges.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Preserving and securing the school's democratic values for future generations and addressing those values in ways that make sense in this new century are formidable challenges for Mercersburg. Additionally, if we are to retain the intimacy and sense of community more commonly associated with a mid-size school while providing the human, programmatic, and physical resources of a larger school, we will need to

continue to sustain and expand our community of support to achieve such audacious goals.

Educational Program

A first-rate academic program is the core of a student's Mercersburg experience. A remarkable academic program will both underpin and link essential components of a total educational experience, an experience which can occur in the dormitories, on the athletic fields, on the stage, in the out-of-doors, in local, regional, national, and international settings, and in any place where human needs exist and can be met. This total educational experience is aimed at developing in students a set of essential skills (skills also identified at the planning retreat) we want them to take away from Mercersburg: an ability to write concisely and well, to speak with clarity and composure, to read with understanding and comprehension, to think critically and independently, to understand and apply the scientific method and the processes that undergird it, to develop competency in mathematical reasoning and problem solving, to adapt to change and also not be reluctant to cause it, and to be self-confident, yet genuinely modest. That total educational experience is also aimed at inculcating in students in intentional ways the important values described in the school's mission.

To respond to these beliefs, we will:

- **Support an admission philosophy and financial aid posture that emphasizes and strengthens the school's egalitarian spirit by admitting exceptional students from broad geographical, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds.**
- **Examine and shape the curriculum to ensure that it remains grounded in the traditions of the liberal arts and the sciences.**
- **Examine and shape the curriculum to ensure that it is dynamic and can respond intelligently and creatively to the challenges of a rapidly changing world.**
- **Strengthen and expand programs that support an international perspective.**
- **Expand and integrate experiential educational opportunities, particularly in the areas of outdoor education and community service, focusing on leadership and character development throughout that process.**
- **Enhance and expand the College Counseling experience and the college admission possibilities for students.**
- **Develop, use, and apply internal and external academic measurements and benchmarking tools.**

- **Utilize a weekly and yearly calendar that maximizes our human, programmatical, physical, and financial resources.**

Faculty and Staff

No doubt, various parts of the total Mercersburg experience leave lasting impressions on students; the beauty and harmony of the campus itself, friendships formed during the boarding school years, and memorable extracurricular experiences likely rank among the most important. Surely no greater impression is made, though, than by the remarkable men and women employed by the school who take a real and abiding interest in young people at such an impressionable time in their lives. Not only are faculty at the heart of the academic experience, but they also coach, counsel, discipline, and support students in every possible way. Faculty must be serious scholars as well as excellent role models who instill in young people a sense of integrity, purpose, and appreciation for the value systems of our school and our nation. Skilled, loyal staff members also play a crucial and necessary role in this process as they contribute to an orderly, healthy, well-functioning school community.

To ensure the hiring and retention of a remarkable faculty and staff, we will:

- **Provide faculty a salary and benefits package which in the aggregate places Mercersburg in the top third of our comparison peer group (ABOPS).**
- **Provide staff a similar aggregate salary and benefits package, with the top third of the peer group being defined by the local labor market.**
- **Create more opportunities for the professional, personal, and intellectual growth and rejuvenation of faculty.**
- **Ensure flexible and excellent faculty housing opportunities.**
- **Set and achieve faculty and staff diversity goals, using the NAIS definition for diversity.**

Facilities

For the past two decades, the school has been systematically building new facilities and renovating and preserving existing spaces on the campus. Those choices have been wise, timely, and deliberate, and they have enhanced the functionality and beauty of the campus, as well as the school's marketability. Academic spaces were the first to receive attention (Lenfest, Irvine, Rutledge). These initiatives were followed by additions to and renovations of student and faculty living spaces (Main, Tippetts, Swank, South Cottage, Culbertson, Fowle, Keil). Several new athletic spaces (Kuhn Wrestling Room, McDowell Fitness Center, Smoyer Tennis Center, Davenport Squash Center, upgrades to

the varsity baseball field, additional practice fields), a major landscape initiative (Residential Quad East), and several academic and student support spaces (a green house, '38 Observatory, Masinter Outdoor Education Center) were also created during this time. The new Burgin Center for the Arts is nearing completion. Although the physical plant has been reinvented in amazing ways during the past twenty or so years, some significant gaps still exist and need to be closed.

To augment the physical resources of this outstanding boarding school, we will:

- **Maximize the artistic, cultural, social, and community-building opportunities provided by the Burgin Center for the Arts.**
- **Capitalize on the opportunity for additional space and resources for other disciplines (especially math, science, and foreign languages) made possible by the top floor of Irvine Hall.**
- **Ensure that all athletic facilities are gender equitable and as commensurate with effective delivery of program as the academic and residential facilities.**
- **Continue development of the landscape architectural zones outlined in the campus master plan, with particular attention presently to the front campus quad.**
- **Improve those major spaces that have not received recent attention and do not lend themselves to most effective delivery of programs, with particular attention to student center and Development Office functions.**
- **Prepare to consider immediately the acquisition of any newly available strategic properties adjacent to the school's boundaries.**
- **Continue to review, update, and utilize the campus master plan.**

Institutional Advancement

Since schools like Mercersburg rely exclusively on the support and good will of alumni, students, faculty, parents, and Board of Regents, strengthening the community of support that already exists at Mercersburg and continually expanding that base are crucial to the school's ongoing success. Also, achieving a high level of voluntary support by the school's constituencies is particularly important for any mid-size school offering the opportunities of a larger school. In this connection, we will:

- **Define and implement an intentional, fully integrated marketing and communications strategy to advance the cause of the school on every front.**

- **Develop, use, and apply internal and external measurements and benchmarking tools regarding development programs and policies.**
- **Establish and achieve goals for continued endowment growth.**
- **Establish and achieve goals for continued growth in annual giving as well as in alumni participation levels.**
- **Establish and achieve goals for making development efforts more donor-centered.**
- **Define, implement, and apply a broad institutional research and analysis strategy.**
- **Increase the number of volunteers, with greater emphasis on support and recognition.**

CONCLUSION

Mercersburg believes and teaches that life's greatest rewards are to be found in surmounting its greatest challenges. It should, therefore, be no surprise that the path to attaining the enduring qualities articulated at the beginning of this plan is a steep one; that is the Mercersburg way. Complete implementation of this strategic plan will require enormous hard work, unflagging energy, additional resources and resourcefulness, and steadfast determination to codify and secure Mercersburg's rightful place in the ranks of the country's finest boarding schools. The past strategic plan lifted many buoys at the school simultaneously; this plan is about keeping those buoys afloat at a high level and closing other existing strategic gaps. As we make decisions about those strategic initiatives that need to be accomplished in the immediate future at Mercersburg, this plan can and should guide us and shine a light for us along our way.