



Strategic Plan
2003-08

Mission Statement

St. Martin's Episcopal School provides students
in prekindergarten through 12th grade
a superior and challenging college-preparatory education
focused on development of the whole person
within the context of a Christian community
a family atmosphere, and a co-educational environment.

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WORTHY OF OUR BEST
A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR
ST. MARTIN'S EPISCOPAL SCHOOL

Dear Members of the St. Martin's Episcopal School Community,

We are happy to present you the new strategic plan for St. Martin's. This plan builds on the success of *Excellence in the Balance*, a document approved by the Board of Trustees in 1996 and implemented over the subsequent five academic years. Our advances in campus master planning, student support services, capital fund raising, facilities improvements, diversity of the school community, curricular continuity and integration, technology, fiscal stability and school spirit can be directly connected to *Excellence in the Balance*. After making such strides, we confidently reviewed our identity and status during the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS) reaccreditation process that culminated in our 2002 reaccreditation for an additional 10 years. As we completed our self-study, we were fully mindful that we were on the verge of another moment of strategic focus. The ISAS Visiting Committee confirmed that insight when they offered the following as one of their core recommendations:

“Recognizing that the Board of Trustees and administration have waited until the completion of the accreditation process to develop further plans for the future, the Committee recommends that the school embark on a new round of strategic planning to chart a clear and coherent course for the next several years.”

This document represents our response to that recommendation. We believe that it possesses the requisite clarity and coherence, and we hope that it also motivates and inspires us to make this wonderful school even better in the years ahead.

We thank all those who participated in the strategic planning process, most particularly our fellow members of the Strategic Planning

Committee. (We have listed their names in an appendix.) They made a significant commitment of time and energy to this effort, and we are most grateful to them for their critical role in bringing this document to life. We were also blessed by the genial, authoritative and astute guidance of consultant Jim McManus who set us on a proper and fruitful course.

We offer this plan as the beginning not the end. We believe it provides a proper guide for our school as we move through the first decade of the 21st century. As we commence our work to implement this plan, we commend it to you and to the God who has been and is the source of so many blessings in the life of St. Martin's Episcopal School.

Faithfully,



Beth Hughes DePass '79
Vice Chair, Board of Trustees



Leo P. Dressel
President and Head of School

PREFACE

In early fall 2002 the Board of Trustees set as its ambitious first goal for the academic year the following: Successful completion of a strategic planning process by May 2003. To reach that goal, Beth DePass, then Vice Chair of the Board (and Chair effective July 1, 2003), was designated Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee, and the school selected Jim McManus to serve as consultant to the committee and the process. Jim has ably served as Head at two fine independent schools and more recently has focused his time on school consultation in the areas of planning, governance and program assessment.

Based on his suggestions and consultation with various school constituents, the committee was assembled. We made special efforts to include many voices at the table and to identify people who had various associations and connections with St. Martin's. Committee members have invested approximately 20-25 hours of time to this effort, and the efficacy of their efforts is apparent in the quality of the plan.

In subsequent months the planning process included the following phases:

- ◆ Committee consideration of trends affecting independent education generally and St. Martin's Episcopal School specifically (November)
- ◆ Committee brainstorming of specific strategic issues for St. Martin's (November)
- ◆ Drafting of "first-round" goals and rationales by each committee member (December)
- ◆ Small group and full committee discussions of first-round goals (January)
- ◆ Drafting of a goal for each of seven thematic areas selected by consensus of the committee (January)

- ◆ Feedback regarding the themes and goals by members of the school community through II constituency forums (February-March)
- ◆ Committee discussion of feedback from school constituencies (March)
- ◆ First draft of strategic plan (March)
- ◆ Committee discussion and revision of first draft of strategic plan (March)
- ◆ Committee comment and final revision of strategic plan (April)
- ◆ Approval of the plan by the Board of Trustees (May)

While the schedule for the planning process was quite ambitious, this enhanced the dynamism and urgency of the committee's work. They responded to the challenge posed by the Board's May 2003 deadline for the completion of the process with enthusiasm and dedication.

The plan focuses on many important dimensions of life at St. Martin's: its purpose, its people, its programs, and its resources. The committee feels strongly that the first theme of the document - the Episcopal mission and identity of St. Martin's Episcopal School - needs to be in that priority position. Our mission and identity provides the foundation and focus from which all that we do flows. In addition, while all members of the St. Martin's community are important and valued, the committee also embraces the passionate conviction that its work is first and foremost on behalf of the current and future students of St. Martin's. All that we do is for their benefit. These principles have informed our work, and we trust that they have been convincingly infused into the plan.

Statement of Philosophy

The charge of St. Martin's Episcopal School, as set forth in the school's charter, is: "...to maintain a school for the youth of the New Orleans area and to provide a program that will give its students an opportunity to gain a sound elementary and college preparatory education in a Christian environment, under the auspices of the Episcopal Church."

This charge is given succinct and effective expression by the school's motto: "Faith, Scholarship, Service." St. Martin's is an Episcopal school, founded upon Christian principles, open to students of all religious, cultural and racial backgrounds. It strives to create an atmosphere that fosters the love of God and the love of humanity. Its students are offered opportunities for formal worship in the Episcopal tradition as well as the study of Christianity and the other leading world religions.

The Episcopal Church distinguishes between education and evangelism and recognizes that the primary purpose of St. Martin's School is to educate.

In its approach to education, St. Martin's addresses the broad range of human development; it seeks to develop the whole person. It stimulates intellectual growth and encourages academic achievement. It values physical development and a sense of personal competence. At the same time, individual spiritual and emotional growth is regarded as a matter of paramount importance. A strong belief in one's own self-worth is a hallmark of St. Martin's students. It is also a community with a sense of responsibility, service and mutual regard.

St. Martin's is a college-preparatory school and it offers a curriculum fully appropriate to that end. It is a lively center of learning and teaching where intellectual attainment is respected and properly commemorated. Learning also takes place in a wide variety of extracurricular settings. St. Martin's stands for educational excellence in its broadest sense. In its relationship to the larger society, St. Martin's rejects insularity and

narrow provincialism. We celebrate our school and its traditions but recognize that our students will live in a world that is globally interdependent and technologically advanced and one in which knowledge is increasing exponentially.

St. Martin's is deeply committed to the education of each of its students. The school offers an educational experience that brings together knowledge, faith, awareness of the world and profound respect for the individual.

St. Martin's Episcopal School Prayer

The following prayer, written by St. Martin's chaplains, is part of the school's many chapel services.

Gracious God, we pray to you for the mission and ministry of St. Martin's School. Grant that the members of our community, seeing the image of God in one another, may be guided in the ways of wisdom. May we pursue excellence, unite ourselves in bonds of love and be strengthened in patience, compassion and persistence.

Increase, O Lord, our intellectual curiosity and zeal for learning. Give us the will and strength to do our best. May we never shrink from that which is difficult, and may we never fail to see an aura of wonder in everything on earth.

Most of all, dear Lord, surround us with your presence, so that all in the St. Martin's community will feel loved and secure. Amen.

MISSION AND IDENTITY

Goal: Strengthen the Episcopal and spiritual identity of the school.

Background:

The foundation for all the good embodied by St. Martin's Episcopal School is centered in its mission and identity, encapsulated in the school motto of "Faith, Scholarship and Service." Authentic Episcopal schools are grounded in faith and acknowledge the divine and transcendent as the proper lens and horizon for education. We are faith-based in a precisely Episcopal fashion, true to that tradition that consciously welcomes seekers and searchers of all traditions. While we make efforts to root our worship and all other activities within the Christian context characteristic of the Episcopal Church, our challenge is to ensure that our religious identity is both clearly defined and consciously inclusive. While embracing and expressing the school's own tradition faithfully, we make no apology about our identity even as we encourage each member of our community to develop the spiritual dimension of one's life and to honor one's religious tradition.

Scholarship is a necessary focus of a genuine Episcopal school since the Anglican tradition clearly recognizes the importance of reason in the quest for ultimate meaning in the life of every person. Our commitment to scholarship thus does not dilute our religious identity but sharpens and reinforces it. Our mission is to be an instrument in the spiritual transformation of our students- not their conversion. We must pay attention to the spiritual, moral and religious dimensions of our students' lives if we are to honor our Episcopal identity.

Service learning must also be fully appreciated and structured within the context of that identity. The incarnational Christian theology that provides our foundation impels us in the direction of regard for service as a constitutive element of student life and learning.

Suggestions for implementation:

- ◆ Review our mission statement to ensure that it demonstrates most persuasively our fidelity to the Episcopal tradition and commitment to inclusiveness and diversity.
- ◆ Make clear the ways in which we are living our commitment to our identity and mission and communicate our core values to all constituencies often and effectively.
- ◆ Emphasize and structure moments of worship and reflection in ways most fitting for the developmental and spiritual needs of our students and all members of our community.
- ◆ Increase the emphasis on ethics and spirituality in the curriculum and life of the school.
- ◆ Make integrated and school-wide service learning a foundational hallmark of St. Martin's and raise the awareness of this school characteristic in the greater community.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Goal: Maintain the ongoing comprehensive review and revision of the curriculum.

Background:

Educational excellence remains a defining characteristic of St. Martin's Episcopal School. Our approach will be continued provision of academic and co-curricular activities that enable students to learn and excel in a variety and wide range of disciplines, venues and endeavors. We steadfastly propose an educational program of "excellence in the balance." This phrase indicates the school's commitment to serve every dimension of each student's life and to measure its success according to the highest educational and other standards. We understand the term "educational programs" broadly to include academic courses and subjects, the religious life of the school, co-curricular opportunities (such as athletics, student

government, forensics, theater, clubs), community-based experiential education, service learning projects, ethical and practical life skills, research projects, and the implied curriculum shaped by school culture and community.

Thus our educational task is ambitious but worthy of our best efforts. In a school that comprises 14 grade levels of explicitly college preparatory education, continuity and coherence are essential. In a world increasingly demanding and complex, we must combine rigorous standards with heightened awareness of the needs of individual students. In a society ever richer in its diversity we must be a school that embraces differences and provides a hospitable learning and living environment for students from a broad range of cultural, geographical, religious and family backgrounds. “Excellence in the balance” will thus be a dynamic and responsive enterprise.

Suggestions for implementation:

- ◆ With student needs in the forefront, refine and strengthen curricular integration and continuity across disciplines and grade levels, using the best educational research and the highest national educational standards.
- ◆ Benchmark all programs against the best practices of independent education.
- ◆ Incorporate educational and student life programs that promote development of leadership, decision-making skills and ethical values.
- ◆ Place a priority on faculty professional development to guarantee effective integration of various technologies into the educational program.
- ◆ Construct a master schedule for the entire school that best serves the goals of our educational programs.

- ◆ Design innovative programs to promote awareness regarding issues such as nutrition, lifelong wellness, exercise, sexuality, alcohol and other drugs, etc.
- ◆ Maintain and enhance a student-centered co-curricular program that is ambitious and balanced, rooted in the mission and philosophy of the school, and staffed according to the same high standards applied to other educational programs.

FACULTY, ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

Goal: Sustain a strong, diverse and vibrant faculty, administration and staff, with a particular emphasis on addressing the varied needs and talents of new, experienced and master teachers, administrators and staff.

Background:

Students are at the heart of a St. Martin's education, and our human resources- faculty, administration and staff- are most vital in assuring the excellence of that education. Societal trends suggest that schools will need to be proactive and creative in recruiting and retaining faculty and staff in the days ahead. We have developed over time a faculty, administration and staff of considerable expertise and experience. As our professional cadre continues on the path to maturity, we must respond to the exemplary mature teachers in our midst. We must be sensitive also to the situation of our promising younger professional colleagues, our hope for the future. We wish to model in our approach to our faculty, administration and staff the values we proclaim to our students and their families each day. We believe firmly that a school is only as strong as its people.

Suggestions for implementation:

- ◆ Enhance and improve professional development and performance evaluation.
- ◆ Develop a multifaceted approach to recruitment of a faculty, administration and staff that more clearly mirrors the diversity of our student body.
- ◆ Make compensation levels highly competitive by determination of appropriate benchmarks.
- ◆ Craft a flexible benefits plan that provides options and opportunities for employees in various stages of life and career.
- ◆ Explore criteria for flexibility in assignments and opportunities for mature teachers within the context of the needs of students and the school.

PARENTS, ALUMNI AND EXTENDED SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Goal: Foster a family and community atmosphere with all constituencies.

Background:

While the previous section focuses necessary attention on the professionals at the heart of St. Martin's excellence, the other members of our school community are also critical to our success. Our school has long and rightly been known for its "family atmosphere." This is a school that regards each individual respectfully, that treasures hospitality as a core value, and blends a highly demanding program with a distinctively nurturing and unpretentious social environment. St. Martin's Episcopal School regards all the members of the extended school family as essential partners in our noble educational and community enterprise.

Suggestions for implementation:

- ◆ Create more occasions for students, faculty, staff and parents to gather across divisional and grade levels.
- ◆ Craft parent educational, informational and social events that enhance their sense of partnership with the school.
- ◆ Encourage and facilitate grade-level gatherings for parents and families.
- ◆ Welcome families new to our school with our distinctive hospitality.
- ◆ Include alumni of all ages in school volunteer organizations and consultative bodies.
- ◆ Target involvement of alumni to their specific stage of life and interest area.
- ◆ Identify volunteer opportunities for grandparents and other friends of the school.
- ◆ Establish more ways for alumni, past parents, grandparents and friends of the school to stay connected to campus life.
- ◆ Increase availability of school facilities to the extended school family.
- ◆ Open activities- including parent support groups, guest lecturers, and cultural presentations- to the entire StM community.
- ◆ Welcome and incorporate neighbors into school life by continuing to offer invitations to performances, athletic contests and community dinners and events and informing them of major events at the school.

FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Goal: Refine and expand St. Martin's institutional advancement efforts, which include philanthropic support, connection with all constituents, and enhanced community awareness of the school's excellence.

Background:

St. Martin's Episcopal School faces its future in a sound and healthy financial position as measured by careful and balanced budgeting, sensitivity to debt burden, expert financial forecasting and management, and recent strong and improved performance in annual and capital fund-raising. Our opportunities for growth and improvement (in terms of facilities, programs, human resources and broadened socio-economic access) are currently constricted by our limited endowment. Institutional advancement includes efforts to enhance the breadth and depth of philanthropic support for the school, the sense of connection between St. Martin's and all constituents, and community awareness of the benefits of St. Martin's to the New Orleans region. While maintaining a course of fiscal prudence and stability, we must explore alternatives for financial enhancements for the long-term health and potential of the school.

Suggestions for implementation:

- ◆ Continue to educate our parents as to the value of a St. Martin's education and the financial requirements to maintain such high value.
- ◆ Teach students about the importance of philanthropy as a core element of a person's life.
- ◆ Energize alumni involvement in all aspects of institutional advancement.

- ◆ Expand the benefactor pool, particularly beyond the current parent body.
- ◆ Promote endowment, inform constituencies about its purpose and benefits, and then craft and implement a strategic endowment campaign.
- ◆ Create a major gifts strategy and institute a new cycle of capital campaign preparation.
- ◆ Target annual giving for continued ambitious but reasonable growth.
- ◆ Develop strategies to increase non-tuition revenue.

CAMPUS

Goal: Make the campus and facilities a model of educational excellence for our families and for the community.

Background:

The campus of St. Martin's Episcopal School is in many ways an inviting and conducive setting for our educational mission. In an urban community so densely developed, our campus provides breathing room and an attractive place for our students to learn and to grow. The stately oak trees on our front lawn symbolize the safe and sheltering welcome we provide all members of our school family and also connote the substance of the life and educational program they will find here on a daily basis.

Our campus developed on a horizontal scale, mirroring and encouraging the ease and intimacy of human interaction that we prize. Recent capital improvements have energized the entire school community and enhanced various programs and activities. These elegant new facilities have also made many members of the school community more acutely aware of the deficits of some facilities that still do not match the quality of our

programs or our people. Future plans must include new and/or substantially renovated spaces across all activities (academics, athletics, and school community worship and events) and all 18 acres of the campus. In addition, continued focused attention is needed on essential deferred maintenance related to such infrastructure elements as improved lighting, plumbing/bathrooms, and HVAC (heating, ventilation, air conditioning).

Suggestions for implementation:

- ◆ Instill a sense of pride in all constituents regarding our shared ownership of St. Martin's campus and facilities.
- ◆ Devote continued attention to preserving a campus that is simultaneously inviting and safe.
- ◆ Review the campus master plan on a regular basis and clearly communicate proposed campus and facilities revisions and enhancements to the St. Martin's community.
- ◆ Upgrade older buildings both in terms of utility and aesthetics to meet appropriately high standards.
- ◆ Pay particular attention to deferred maintenance, major repairs and maintenance funding.

ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING

Goal: Increase enrollment with an emphasis on Lower School and nursery.

Background:

The enrollment at St. Martin's has stabilized in the range of 800 students. Closer analysis of enrollment numbers suggests success in attracting significant numbers of new students into the Upper School.

The enrollment in that academic division is at its highest level in 15 years. We have also proven to be a particularly attractive independent school option for families new to the New Orleans area. We confirm our commitment to remain a metropolitan school not limited or dominated by a particular neighborhood, area or social grouping. We must improve our efforts and strategies to attract more native and new families to choose St. Martin's in Lower School. Developing a nursery program will accomplish many purposes, including the one suggested in the previous sentence. In addition, this program will provide considerable benefit for teachers with young families, our current families, and our young alumni. Our efforts to make the greater community more aware of the excellence and distinctive qualities of a St. Martin's education have met with considerable success, but continued effort in this area is very important.

Suggestions for implementation:

- ◆ Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing plan with an emphasis on the new nursery program.
- ◆ Attract students from within the StM family, focusing on increasing the enrollment of children of alums and faculty/staff in addition to siblings of current and former students.
- ◆ Build on the recent strides made in enhancing the diversity of the student body.
- ◆ Foster relationships with Episcopal schools and churches to increase applicants from these sources.
- ◆ Create strategies for targeted non-Episcopal feeder schools and certain public schools.
- ◆ Develop activities and plans to bolster student retention.

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

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Leo P. Dressel, President and Head of School
Jim McManus, Consultant

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