

# The Journey Forward

THE GIRLS' SCHOOL OF AUSTIN  
2024 - 2030 STRATEGIC PLAN



## Frequently Asked Questions

*Updated August 2024*

### **1. How was the strategic plan created? Who was involved?**

In the winter of 2022, the GSA's Board of Trustees engaged [Greg Bamford](#) from [Leadership + Design](#) to guide us through the strategic planning process. It was clear from the outset that the GSA's next strategic plan would be a collaborative effort among the Steering Committee, the Design Team, and members of the GSA community. Greg and members of the Design Team spent time conducting Empathy Interviews, listening to the stories of parents and staff who shared their insights and ideas about the GSA's identity and future, through the lens of their personal experiences. These conversations served more than the obvious purpose of helping guide the strategic planning work; they also helped build and strengthen the connective tissue of the community at a time when we were still in "COVID recovery" and learning the approach and style of a relatively new Head of School. Empathy Interviews - which were one-on-one conversations held primarily in September - were followed in October 2023 by Think Tanks, larger meetings by constituency, conducted by Greg.

Meanwhile, following each Strategic Design Team monthly meeting, team members were tasked with "homework," assignments to research, explore, brainstorm, and iterate in smaller groups. These tasks and the subsequent meetings often felt like graduate level courses; we learned an incredible amount about the GSA, about trends in education and in the world, and about each other. By the time Winter Break rolled around, we had identified four areas of inquiry which served as the "anchors" for Community Design Day in January, a day-long event with wide-spread community participation. As promised, the day turned out to be fun, connective, and energizing. The ideas that were generated by the eight table teams - two per inquiry area - were greater than the sum of their parts. At the end of the afternoon, the walls of the MUB were covered with chart paper filled with prototypes of roof gardens, satellite campuses, school buses, preschools, and makerspaces.

The Design Team took the ideas from Community Day and iterated drafts of strategic approaches. The Steering Committee then distilled those drafts into possible versions of a strategic plan. From there, Rebecca Yacono drew upon the threads that emerged and the research done throughout the process to create the Pillars and Goals. These then went through an additional several weeks of review and revision by school leadership last spring, with the end result being the Strategic Plan you have in front of you.

Our approach to this strategic planning process was GSA all the way. The process was inclusive, and participants engaged with curiosity, creativity, and a willingness to take risks; as a community, we modeled what we cultivate in our students. We are grateful for all the time, energy, and intentionality that went into the process, and we are excited to share the outcome and move forward with you all.

## **2. How will GSA students benefit from this Strategic Plan?**

GSA students were front of mind throughout the planning process. From considerations about child development to curriculum, from attracting the best educators to the long-term financial sustainability of the school, this Strategic Plan will enhance and sustain GSA students today and into the future.

## **3. Is there data that informs GSA's Strategic Plan?**

Research was one of the primary tasks of Design Team members. We interviewed members of all our constituencies as well as administrators and consultants from schools like ours and organizations with aligned values. In addition, we used internal and external quantitative data, including historical enrollment and financial aid data, CTP scores, survey results, HR records, and comparative numbers acquired from [NAIS DASL](#), [NAIS Market View](#), [NBOA BIIS](#), and Austin/Travis County demographic data. Research-informed and education industry best practices also informed the work on the Strategic Plan.

## **4. How will GSA achieve this plan?**

The GSA Board of Trustees, Admin team, and faculty will set annual goals and action steps with the Strategic Pillars and Goals in view. Action steps will include drawing on support from and participation by other GSA community members and other people in the greater Austin community. Action steps will also include further research and assessments, committee work, professional development, documentation, networking, and collaboration.

At the end of each year, we will assess progress made and ask ourselves whether the Pillars and Goals still resonate with where we are as a community and whether current social, political, and economic trends and environments continue to support the direction we said we want to go. If the Board and Head of School and her team determine that we are making measurable progress and our direction is still true, we will set the tactical path forward. If it is necessary to reroute our path or revise our destination, we will do so thoughtfully, with research and expertise that will keep decisions aligned to our mission and values. In either case, forward momentum will be top of mind!

## **5. What changes will parents and students see? When will they begin seeing these?**

In the first months or year of this journey, much of the foundational work will be behind the scenes. Trustees, Admin staff, and faculty will be conducting further research, documenting current practices, building partnerships, etc. In fact, many faculty members and staff spent time in the Summer of 2024 collaborating to incorporate community partnerships and resources, design and innovation, and media literacy into teaching and learning at the GSA.

As we actively begin to adapt facilities to accommodate a larger Middle School, expand curriculum opportunities, and cultivate connections within the GSA community, the campus itself will evolve, as will the number of members of the GSA community. With those changes, the work we do in these first months and years will be vital to the GSA retaining our special culture and connections. It should be noted that when we talk about a “larger” Middle School, we are talking about adding 36 additional students in Grades 6-8 for a total of 108 Middle School students. This growth will not change the intimate feel of our community, and the Lower School students will experience minimal impact due to this growth.

#### **6. How will GSA support faculty and staff in achieving this plan?**

Clarity of the path forward is one of the best ways for us to ensure that faculty, staff, and trustees feel supported and capable of moving us toward achieving these goals on a year-to-year and long-term basis. Some of the answer to this question is built into Pillar 1 of the plan, namely, responsive benefits and compensation, coverage for classes, and new and more professional development opportunities. We have identified the responsibilities for many aspects of the 2024-2025 action plans; those responsibilities lie between the staff and the GSA Board of Trustees. In addition, some aspects of the plan will require us to turn to you, our parents and families, as well as to alums and members of the greater Austin community. We are excited about those partnerships.

#### **8. How will GSA update the community on progress towards this plan?**

As described in question # 5, over the life of the strategic plan, success will be measured primarily through progress assessments - ongoing and annual. End-of-year progress assessments will inform the goals for the following year and recalibration of the goals, if necessary. With these ongoing checks on progress toward our goals, we will also give ongoing updates to the community, particularly at the start and end of each school year as well as when a particular goal is achieved. Some of those moments will deserve community-wide celebration!

Ideally, GSA’s subsequent strategic plans will build off of the work we do in the next six years!

#### **9. How will we pay for the programs envisioned in this plan?**

The order of the Pillars is significant; they build on one another, in a sort of “order of operations.” In addition, some of the action steps for one Pillar are repeated under another Pillar. The final Pillar, “Invest in a Thriving Future,” ensures that through tuition and fundraising, the GSA will secure its future for generations of girls to come by maintaining and growing our facilities, investing in outstanding teachers, and endowing our sustainability going forward. Your involvement and belief in our mission are vital as we work towards sustaining and enriching the educational experience we offer.

#### **10. If I have questions about the plan, who do I speak to?**

Please join us on September 6, 2024, at either 8:30am (following Community Meeting) or at 12:00 noon (lunchtime) for a Coffee and Conversation with Ms. Yacono. She will share more insights and answer questions about the strategic plan. If you miss it, please do not hesitate to make an appointment with [Ms. Yacono](#) to get the answers to your questions!