

Report to the ECF Community

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During the past months I have had the pleasure of engaging with students, faculty, administration, staff, parents, trustees, and alumni in a series of conversations about our mission and values, our collective achievements and aspirations, and how I as new Head of School can best lead ECF to reach our shared goals. Hundreds of individuals took the time to contribute to our dialogue. In each of our conversations we celebrated our successes, and, as true progressives, we looked towards the future with anticipation.

I have listened to the multiple voices of our community express one common aspiration—delivering the promise of an ECF education to all our students. As promised, I am reporting on what I have learned and am outlining how we should proceed. Below you will find our conversations distilled into five big themes. After a summary of each, I present questions to be addressed and propose a series of next steps. Some of the action items are concrete and finite; others are broader and on-going. This report is a starting point for the work our community must undertake in the months ahead. It must dovetail with the NYSAIS Self Study (in progress) and be incorporated into the strategic planning process in 2012-2013.

I. Embracing our Mission: The (Re)foundational Imperative

We must understand the mission of our school and how we intend to live by it today and into the future. The time is right to undertake an institutional process that will result in a renewal of our commitment to our foundational values, adapted to the twenty-first century.

Key Questions:

- What is our mission? Why does it matter? How do we see it articulated and practiced into the next decades?
- How do we identify, define, and propose to live by our principles and values?
- How will we define success?

Proposed Action Steps:

- Complete the NYSAIS Self Study 2011-12
- Launch the Strategic Planning process 2012-13
- Regularize conversations between the Head of School and the broad ECF community

II. Excelling in Progressive Education

Our mission requires that we are intentionally, imaginatively, boldly, and continuously progressive. It acknowledges that diversity is a prerequisite for educational excellence. In the pursuit of excellence, ethics must be embedded in our practice. But excellence does not happen spontaneously. We must consider which pedagogical models work best for our students, and we must continue to attract and retain stellar principals and faculty members to make this happen.

Key Questions:

- How do we define excellence in progressive education in the twenty-first century?
- What are the skills, knowledge base, practices, technology, and ethical principles that we deem vital to our educational promise?
- How will we know when we are excelling?

Proposed Action Items:

- Complete the searches for EC and US principals
- Initiate summer program for faculty on progressive teaching and learning
- Strengthen professional development and evaluation for continued improvement
- Establish task forces in key strategic areas

III. Empowering a Culture of Collaboration and Respect

We must nurture a culture of collaboration and respect throughout the school community. Modeling ethical, collaborative, respectful, professional, and civil behavior in and outside the classroom is everyone's responsibility. These norms and values are essential for ethical education to thrive in a complex and diverse world. Moreover, a culture of collaboration will facilitate curricular alignment and operational efficiency across the four divisions, which in turn will contribute to learning and financial sustainability.

Key Questions:

- How do we foster a culture of professional collegiality and collaboration?
- What structures ensure transparency, accountability, and collaboration among individuals, departments, and divisions?
- How do we connect the four divisions in ways that maximize student learning, leverage our resources wisely, and support our mission and values?

Proposed Action Items:

- Create opportunities for curricular and organizational alignment
- Consider ways to leverage resources effectively and efficiently across the school
- Articulate adult norms of collegial behavior
- Clarify, as needed, the roles and responsibilities of administrators and department chairs

IV. Enhancing Communication and Community

We must articulate with clarity and conviction who we are and what we believe in—deed and creed must be in congruence. We must reexamine how we communicate internally and externally as proper communication builds community.

Key Questions:

- How does communication, both internal and external, support our mission and our admissions and institutional advancement efforts?
- Are the current channels of communication effective?
- How will we improve internal and external communication? How might increased use of technology support or undermine our efforts to do so?

Proposed Action Steps:

- Revamp and rethink our communications strategies (improve our website and our channels for internal and external communications)
- Establish Faculty Advisory Group to the Head of School
- Organize open forums with Head of School and faculty, parents, students, and alumni
- Begin periodic meetings between Administrative Council and FIC
- Continue to strengthen the Head of School and P&T partnership

V. Ensuring Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability is mission-centric because we are committed to guaranteeing access to and delivery of the highest quality of education. Therefore, we must be good stewards of all our resources (human, financial, environmental) and be mindful of costs so that we can reinvest in areas of strategic importance.

Key Questions

- What organizational model is best suited for the institution in light of financial and operational constraints and goals?
- How do we continue to cultivate a culture of philanthropy that would result in growth in our endowment?
- What is a desirable and sustainable level of financial aid?

Proposed Action Items

- Plan for administrative efficiency and effectiveness
- Establish a new budgeting model
- Begin the foundational work for a capital campaign
- Analyze and forecast financial aid need in years to come keeping access and affordability at the forefront of planning

During our conversations what came across loud and clear is that we are committed to the highest quality of progressive education-- an education that is as much about the mind as it is about the heart, an education that is not only about what our students know and do but who they are.

I look forward to working with you to live up to this commitment.