



2020 Vision for Catherine Cook School

Strategic Plan 2013-2020

Revised May 8, 2017

Catherine Cook empowers students from preschool through eighth grade to be adaptive, confident and productive stewards of an evolving world. Our community engages with ideals of cultural competence, progressive academics, ethical literacy, and innovation designed to inspire personal excellence and compassionate leadership.

The 2013-2020 Strategic Plan for the Catherine Cook School is a living document that was drafted and unanimously approved by the Board of Trustees on Monday, January 28, 2013. The plan was reviewed and revised by the Board of Trustees and a working committee of administrators and was unanimously approved as modified on May 11, 2015. This document was again reviewed and revised by the Board of Trustees and a working committee of administrators on April 5, 2017. Its goal is to further the Catherine Cook mission by guiding the School's direction through the 2019-2020 school term. This document is a summary of the specific initiatives and advances to be undertaken by the school within that time frame.

Year 1: 2013-2014 School Term
Year 2: 2014-2015 School Term
Year 3: 2015-2016 School Term
Year 4: 2016-2017 School Term
Year 5: 2017-2018 School Term
Year 6: 2018-2019 School Term
Year 7: 2019-2020 School Term

I. Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is the strategic entity of the school, responsible for its long-term sustainability. It is given the "trust" to establish the essential nature of the school, to raise necessary funds, to oversee school governance issues, and to hire the Head of School. Trustees are invited to serve for terms of a duration according to the school's strategic needs. The Board has ultimate responsibility for the school and concerns itself with accounting for the use of tuition and other funds. It does so by devising and controlling budgets, serving as the school's legally accountable body, appointing a Head of School, and setting general school policy. Board members receive no compensation or preferment for their service and are called upon to make extensive time commitments.

To improve on its already impressive body of work, the Board will:

1. Build to 14-18 profiled members to enhance leadership skills, develop more effective committee structures, and improve diversity and fundraising efforts (Continuous);
2. Strengthen the committee structure, goals, timelines, and deliverables to ensure alignment with the Strategic Plan and annual strategic goals set by the Board (Continuous);
3. Consider adding non-Trustees to appropriate committees as one method to recruit new members (Years 3-6);
4. Continue to find opportunities to acquire property near the school and execute on such purchases when advantageous (Years 5-7);
5. Establish an endowment (Year 5); and
6. Formalize succession planning for key employees and Board leadership (Years 5-7).

II. Advancement

Advancement encompasses admission, marketing, communication, and fundraising. Through the functions of Advancement, the school builds relationships with all constituents and tells the story of Catherine Cook.

To this end, Catherine Cook Advancement will:

1. Firmly establish the Catherine Cook brand in the local market by leveraging local and regional media resources (Continuous);
2. Continue to communicate via a clear messaging platform that will serve as a consistent voice for the entire school – both internally and externally – including, but not limited to, quality programs, diversity, innovation, progressive education, and small class sizes (Continuous);
3. Develop and implement communication plans for major milestones of change, including, but not limited to, an endowment (Continuous); and
4. Manage the messaging, planning, and conducting of a campaign for an endowment (Years 5-7).

III. Program & Community

Program and community are the flagships of the Catherine Cook mission. As such, Catherine Cook is committed to periodic review and reflection about current best practices. Catherine Cook will continue to place current century technologies and progressive learning strategies at the forefront of curriculum planning and programming.

To further this goal, Catherine Cook will:

1. Continue the work of becoming a fully-enrolled, three-section junior school (Continuous);
2. Continue to support professional development opportunities on social and emotional development and support for all students (Continuous);
3. Explore expansion of fine arts by building relationships with the neighborhood school's art programs and other local options (Ongoing);
4. Identify existing service learning projects across the divisions and establish guidelines for these projects. Make service learning explicit within the progressive education vision. Explore ways to expand service learning to serve both family and student populations (Years 3-4);
5. Enhance services to students who demonstrate academic abilities both above and below the norm by providing greater opportunities for differentiated learning and teacher training. Add additional staff in accordance with the determined needs of the students (Ongoing);
6. Fine tune the documentation of teacher evaluation and our instructional coaching process. Continue to support robust funding for professional development of faculty culture (Year 5 and Ongoing);
7. Through personal counseling, continue to support students and parents throughout the high school admission process, continue to build strong relationships with Chicagoland schools, and promote the concept of a good fit high school for our students and their parents (Continuous);
8. Continue to articulate and socialize our vision for a progressive education (Year 5); and
9. Explore feasibility of a professional development restricted fund endowment (Year 5).

IV. Diversity

Diversity sustains and promotes the health of an organization. Catherine Cook will enhance the diversity of the school by intentionally cultivating an empathic and open climate to foster relationships of integrity between the children and families in our school community. The organizational benefits of a diverse community of families, faculty, and staff include increased adaptability, critical thinking, and more effective and innovative problem solving. A diverse school reflects and enriches the community in which it exists.

We define diversity as the range of differences between people, but most commonly: racial; socio-economic; cultural or ethnic/language; physical ability; age; gender and gender identity; sexual identity; and religious differences.

To further this goal, Catherine Cook will:

1. Seek, support, and retain families, faculty, staff, and Board members from groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in elite institutions or in positions of power due to their race, ethnicity/language, age, religion, physical ability, gender, gender identity, sexual identity, or socio-economic class (Continuous);
2. Build our own cultural competence through formal and informal professional development in order to create a welcoming environment for all children and adults and to maintain a vibrant and stimulating learning atmosphere for children and adults (Continuous);
3. Develop and implement curriculum that enables children to become culturally competent (Continuous);
4. Incorporate mechanisms or systems to measure the school's progress in the area of diversity, as defined by these strategic initiatives (Continuous); and
5. Commit to targeting endowment funds for recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations (Continuous).

V. Financial Planning

Critical to long-term sustainability is comprehensive financial planning. Catherine Cook remains committed to developing its strategic and financial plans.

To further our financial goals, Catherine Cook will:

1. Adhere to the financial plan, supported by tuition, fundraising, and ancillary activities to ensure delivery of the best program possible by faculty with materials and facilities representative of the school's overall goals (Continuous);
2. Maintain debt policy to limit scheduled long term debt service to a maximum of 5% of total operating expenses in the annual budget (Years 1-4). Reexamine debt policy in accordance with anticipated campus expansion (Ongoing);
3. Retire the remaining interim expansion project financing of \$2 million subordinated debt (Year 5);
4. Identify appropriate sources of revenue and timelines to support future campus expansion and improvements (Years 3-6);
5. Review and revise schedule for allocation of depreciation; and
6. Incorporate into budget funding allowances for (Years 5-7):
 - Feasibility study for campus expansion
 - Succession planning
 - Search firm
 - ISACS visit
 - Executive coaching
 - Increased 403(b) match

VI. Campus

Continual campus care and development are important aspects of the Catherine Cook program. The Board of Trustees is committed to quality sustainable facilities to support the school's outstanding programs.

To further develop the campus, Catherine Cook will:

1. Improve HVAC in the main loft building (Years 3-4);
2. Develop a real estate plan to acquire near-by properties to expand the campus foot print (Years 3-7);
3. Assess the facility needs for theater, dance, fine arts, music, and athletic fields (Years 3-6);
4. Work with the Finance Committee to establish an asset allocation strategy for the endowment (Years 6-7); and
5. Assess the facility needs in support of program development (Ongoing).

VII. Innovation

Innovation is embedded in the school's ongoing mission to provide current century learning opportunities to our students, professional development for our faculty, and access to emerging and traditional technologies for our entire community. Recent initiatives, such as the cross-divisional IDEA program and affiliated IDEA Lab, AV Studio, and enhanced staffing combine with the forward-thinking foundation built by Catherine Cook during the last decade.

To further develop Innovation, Catherine Cook will:

1. Conduct a Wi-Fi site survey (Year 3);
2. Network and engage with high schools, universities, and professional organizations in order to more broadly write curriculum for students and certifications for teachers in design, systems, and computational thinking (Ongoing);
3. Investigate the acquisition of current and new technologies that will streamline and strengthen both teaching and learning experiences (Ongoing);
4. Continue to develop the IDEA:TE conference and create regular outreach events with the goal of establishing Catherine Cook as the hub of teacher training, a laboratory school, and an international center for innovation curriculum (Ongoing);
5. Conduct a feasibility study to build an Innovation Center, which will serve as Catherine Cook's hub of interdisciplinary art, design, engineering, and science (Year 5);
6. Continue to articulate that developmentally-appropriate and intentional integration of emerging and traditional technology is a vital and key aspect of progressive education in curricular documents, external marketing, and internal planning work (Ongoing); and
7. Build a robust professional development plan for faculty and staff, including web-based training and resources, in-person seminars, offsite school visits, and conferences (Ongoing).

The community that would eventually become Catherine Cook School was founded in 1975 as the Melrose Cooperative Nursery School, housed in the Jewish Community Center. Soon after, it added lower grades to existing preschool programs. In 1985, the school moved to Immaculate Conception Church, next-door to its current location. By 1990, the school's population had grown enough that it was able to purchase and renovate the B&B Shoe Company building at 226 West Schiller. Alex Anagnost, the building's owner, agreed to sell if the trustees would name the school after his late mother, Catherine Cook.

With more spirit and determination than funds, a passionate group of teachers and parents opened the renovated building in 1992. As the school continued to grow, a transition to a professional administrative structure took place. The Board of Trustees rewrote its bylaws in the traditional model of an independent school. In 1997, the school reorganized into its current incarnation as an independent school.

Catherine Cook School has grown rapidly since that time and stands today as a testimony to the vision, commitment, and care of creative teachers, parents, and trustees. The best evidence of our success is the daily stream of children who enter our school with a smile and a lively step in eager anticipation of a productive day in their school community.

