

2013-2018

# MCDS Strategic Plan





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## **Introduction**

Madison Country Day School, founded in 1997, is a strong and vibrant learning community that excels in meeting its mission.

As the School approaches its third decade, the Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, families, and students have worked together over an 18-month period to identify priorities, specify initiatives, and prioritize needs to guide the work of the School over the next five years through the 2017-2018 school year. Focus group meetings with parents reinforced the core values that we hold with respect to an MCDS education and families' hopes for their children as they grow with the School. Faculty focus groups reminded us again and again that the relationships and connections between and among the teachers, students, and families sustain and energize our work. Our high school students underscored the tightly knit nature of our Pre-K-12 community; while they look forward to additional, dedicated physical spaces, they continue to value sharing the same roof as our youngest students.

The next five years will witness the evolution of double-class sections into the MCDS high school, expanding, both figuratively and literally, the breadth of opportunities available to our students. The Strategic Planning Committee and the MCDS Board of Trustees are proud to put forward these principles, initiatives, and representative tactics to build and sustain the mission for generations to come.

This plan is organized around eight principles, each of which includes initiatives and representative tactics. The principles reflect the enduring values of MCDS, the initiatives delineate priorities, and the tactics represent examples of specific actions through which the principles will be supported and the initiatives realized. We recognize that while our principles and initiatives reflect sustaining values of the School, the tactics are subject to change, depending on dynamic variables that respond to the broader economic and social milieu in which the School operates. Accompanying this Strategic Plan are comprehensive plans building upon the representative tactics found below including expected deadlines and lines of accountability.

This Strategic Plan, approved by the MCDS Board of Trustees in September of 2013, reflects the culmination of an intense period of reflection and review. It celebrates MCDS' growth and current success while projecting its vision through 2017-2018.



## **Mission and Philosophy Statements**

The mission of Madison Country Day School is to provide an intellectually stimulating, personally enriching, and academically challenging program in the liberal arts and sciences to an able and diverse student body. We measure the curriculum and student achievement against the finest programs in the world. We also contribute to the larger community by developing effective educational programs to serve as partners with other independent and public schools.

Our mission is grounded in two key beliefs about children and learning:

- Every child possesses an extraordinary capacity to learn.
- Effort is generally more important than ability.

These beliefs drive our decisions, inform our curriculum and pedagogy, and inspire our teaching and learning. They are the touchstones to which we return again and again as the School grows and evolves.

MCDS' mission and philosophy statements are affirmed and reinvigorated on a regular basis by the results of surveys that provide the opportunity for our families, faculty, donors, and students to review and comment on the outcomes of these key statements. The information that these constituents share undergirds and informs our continuous improvement processes.



## **Principle One: The People of MCDS**

***Rationale:*** The School's most powerful and promising assets are its people: faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni. They are the heart of our daily work; their strengths and challenges inform, direct, and compel our next steps. We believe it is essential for the School to continue to take proactive steps to support, sustain, and enhance the experiences of each constituent group.

### Initiative One: Enhance Employee Salary and Benefits

MCDS will continue to enhance the salary and benefits package for MCDS employees to ensure that our School continues to attract, retain, and reward faculty and staff of the highest quality and commitment, and remains a long-term home for these wise and capable colleagues.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Increase the School's employee discretionary retirement contribution by one percent each year to reach a six percent contribution by the 2016-2017 school year.
- Evaluate the expansion of the suite of benefits provided to employees on an annual basis, based in part on feedback from all members of the MCDS faculty and staff.
- Research and evaluate the impact of wellness program options for staff and faculty.
- Continue to develop and enhance recognition programs for employees that not only provide well-deserved recognition but also promote the gifts and talents of the remarkable MCDS faculty and staff to the broader School community.
- Establish a review process and timeline for the analysis of the MCDS Faculty Evaluation and Compensation Pathways rubric to assess its future relevance.

### Initiative Two: Encourage Professional Growth

MCDS will continue to support the professional development of the faculty and staff in order to ensure an exceptional educational experience for students and respond to the increasingly complex world in which these students will live and work.

Representative Tactics:

- Increase the School's professional development stipend to \$500 per full-time equivalent faculty member by the 2017-2018 school year.
- Research the use of specialized professional development funds to promote high-priority core areas of the MCDS mission and recognize the work of exceptional faculty.
- Continue to investigate scheduling options that support time for collaborative professional learning communities within and across grades, departments, and disciplines.

Initiative Three: Use Time as a Resource

MCDS will research, evaluate, and adapt the schedules of faculty, staff, and administrators to further ensure that workloads reflect the balance and priorities of both the MCDS mission and independent school best practices.

Representative Tactics:

- Complete a time allocation study by department and division to inform decisions regarding the optimal allocation of time and resources as well as the potential increases in faculty and staff.
  - The study will reveal employee perceptions and best practice research regarding the ideal balance of instructional and preparatory time by division and department, including time to ensure grade level collaboration, curricular and cross-curricular planning, research regarding best practices, implementation and integration of new programs, and professional development experiences and training.
- Compare staffing models in core administrative areas including Leadership, Business, Marketing, Admissions, and Development within the school to best practices to assess the need for additional staffing in these areas and to inform the creation of an ideal administration staffing model based on enrollment and budgetary projections.

Initiative Four: Sustain a True Home for Families

MCDS will seek and consider the feedback of families, strengthening communication avenues that allow for effective home-and-school partnerships and form the basis of enduring relationships as our alumni enter the wider world.

Representative Tactics:

- Implement a formal feedback loop within the Parent Guild to provide access to School life and culture for as many families as possible.
- Clarify and align the roles of parent volunteers in classrooms to ensure continuity of experience and promote community, both within each grade level and across the School.
- Build an MCDS Alumni Association that creates and maintains bonds between the generations of graduates to come and our School community, providing stories of success and inspiration to current faculty, students, and families.



## **Principle Two: Academic Excellence**

***Rationale:*** MCDS' mission statement is a declaration of our commitment to academic excellence; this commitment is the hallmark and promise of an MCDS education.

Exceptional teachers, research-based and internationally-benchmarked curricula, and differentiated instruction which challenge each student are embedded in the School's culture and practices. Our interpretation of academic excellence is grounded in two of the School's core values: first, that every child has an extraordinary capacity to learn, and second, that effort is generally more important than ability.

### Initiative One: Ongoing Curricular Review

MCDS will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the MCDS curriculum, based on ongoing review of research and best practices, both nationally and internationally as well as on internal measures including student assessment data and faculty, student, and family feedback.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Continue to refine the MCDS scope and sequence for all grades and departments, utilizing the Understanding by Design (UbD) "backwards design" process to ensure that Big Ideas, Essential Questions, and the related assessments, benchmarks, and unit plans are codified and serve the students, curriculum, and faculty.
- Review and analyze MCDS' curriculum and pedagogy, Pre-K-12, to ensure exceptional support both for skills such as critical thinking, analytic thinking, and artistic expression, as well as for an appropriate level of challenge for each student.
- Further formalize the curricular review cycle, including review of new programs that may enhance existing curriculum, tied to the Independent Schools Association of the Central States' (ISACS) accreditation cycle, for all academic departments.
- Review and formalize the individual learning plan processes, both for developing students and students whose talents and/or academic achievement reflect the need for additional challenges.

- Create plan for expansion of science pathways at the secondary level, responding both to constituents' interest and to the national and international attention to science literacy as highlighted in the recently released *Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)*.

#### Initiative Two: Strengthen Departmental Structure

MCDS will investigate, review, and implement a formalized departmental leadership structure to strengthen the Pre-K-12 professional learning communities, empower faculty members, and distribute leadership across the School.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Pilot department chair position in the English Department for the 2013-2014 school year, embedding ongoing reflection and formative assessment into the process.
- Based on a study of the English Department pilot and faculty and staff feedback, prepare for the formalization of all MCDS academic departments on an as-needed basis.
- Create a review and accountability structure for Department Chairs to clarify and ensure the quality and timely completion of departmental goals and responsibilities.

#### Initiative Three: Enhance Cross-Curricular Integration and School-Wide Internationalism

MCDS will encourage collaborative planning and the integration of curricular areas and priorities, including internationalism, across grades and content areas.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Build upon the School's current international curriculum and model to further develop MCDS graduates as true world citizens.
- Embed the value of cross-curricular integration into the fabric of institutional life (e.g., through short presentations at faculty meetings) so that teachers' appreciation of the power and possibility of these insights spills over to enhance student learning and is further systematized within the process of curriculum development.
- Review research-based models of faculty leadership in professional learning communities to inform the "how-to" of building cross-curricular connections.



#### Initiative Four: Monitor Assessment Outcomes

MCDS will continue to research and refine the School's use and communication of quantitative and qualitative student assessment measures to evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of an MCDS education.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Monitor, evaluate, and communicate the value-added results of standardized assessments including the ERB-CTP IV, ACT, and SAT as well as the International Baccalaureate (IB) exams.
- Document and share clear and compelling stories of the impact of an MCDS education, stories that reveal and highlight such components as test scores, college acceptance and scholarships, anecdotal glimpses of challenges met and successes achieved by students, faculty, and alumni, and the demonstration of core MCDS skills including critical thinking, speaking and communication, and global competencies.



### **Principle Three: Financial Strength**

***Rationale:*** Financial strength and stability are the cornerstones of MCDS' continued growth and ultimate success in achieving its mission. Diverse funding sources (i.e., earned income, contributed income, and invested income) allow MCDS to allocate funds to further Principle One of this Plan and expand programming, facilities, and staffing in support of enhanced student learning opportunities.

#### Initiative One: Increase and Maximize Earned Income Sources

MCDS will continue to focus on expanding the ways in which the MCDS success story can leverage additional earned income and provide constituent groups with opportunities to become part of this story.

##### Representative Tactics:

- Continue to plan for the responsible growth and management of student enrollment, including the realization of double-sections through 12th grade as one significant indicator of a vibrant college-preparatory institution.
- Use growth in contributed and invested income to ensure tuition rates are balanced between the needs of the School and the resources of families.
- Continue to expand other earned revenue streams including the judicious rental of School facilities during non-school hours and further develop a summer camp program that reflects the MCDS mission.

#### Initiative Two: Focus on Contributed Income – Friend-Raising and Fundraising

MCDS will continue to expand its circle of friends, colleagues, and supporters as well as broaden the expertise and increase the time of its development staff.

##### Representative Tactics:

- Revise and update the School's messages to major donors regarding the value of an MCDS education to more clearly articulate the opportunities available to support world-class learning for our students and thus make a positive impact on local and global challenges.

- Assess and update the annual fundraising cycle to correspond to best practices in institutional advancement and to the increased professional skills and staffing of the Development Office.
- Drive increases in annual fundraising by showcasing the School's strategic vision and articulating in a compelling manner the essential role donors, big and small, can play in realizing a successful future.

### Initiative Three: Grow Investment Income

#### Representative Tactics:

- Establish and grow an endowment fund with Board of Trustees oversight, which serves both as a reflection of the School's values and vision and as a long-term source of revenue, relieving pressure on the operating budget and helping to buttress the School's financial security.
- Establish an operating reserve to be used for unforeseen expenses with Board of Trustees oversight.

### Initiative Four: Capital Planning

MCDS will continue to plan appropriately for capital improvements and additions to enhance the quality of our facilities and meet the expectations and needs of our student body and School community.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Assess MCDS' capacity for financing future expansion including feasibility studies and investigation of best practices in the capital planning field for both short- and long-term needs.
- Design the appropriate campaign structures to meet the needs of the Strategic Plan and Facility Needs Assessment with partnership from appropriate Board committees while ensuring the ongoing success of annual fundraising efforts.



## **Principle Four: A Respectful and Ethical Environment**

***Rationale:*** A supportive, respectful, and ethical environment builds strong communities, both local and global, encouraging the growth of individual integrity and responsibility.

Members of the MCDS community develop the skills and strategies necessary to make the classroom learning process effective – skills and strategies that transfer to their larger worlds – allowing them to be powerful participants in an increasingly collaborative and connected world.

### Initiative One: Clarify and Align Character Education Program

MCDS will continue to refine its character education program to ensure that it reflects cross-grade coherence and is responsive to cultural challenges including those endemic to an increasingly technological society.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Review the Lower School character education curriculum, the purpose and activities of all-school assemblies, and the Middle and High School advisory curricula to clarify and align their purposes, as needed, within the School's mission.
- Evaluate role of the IB Learner Profile within the community ethos, and consider the implications and applications of the Profile throughout all three divisions.

### Initiative Two: Integrate Character Education into MCDS Mission and Philosophy Statements

MCDS will create a clearer picture of the role and importance of character education in supporting the character and ethical development of the School's students.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Gather informal and formal feedback regarding constituent perceptions of the importance and place of character education in the MCDS community life.
- Create a coherent statement regarding the value of MCDS' character education curricula in the life of the School and integrate it into the School's Mission and Philosophy statement



## **Principle Five: A Broad Educational Experience**

***Rationale:*** The global focus and breadth of an MCDS liberal arts education is a foundational component of the students' educational experience and sets MCDS apart from other educational alternatives, public and private. Academic and extracurricular offerings must parallel the same degree of excellence as our core academic programming to ensure the quality and continuity of our students' experience and to support the goal of graduating multilingual, global citizens with the skills and abilities to live and compete successfully in a rapidly changing world.

### Initiative One: Enhance Extracurricular Experiences

MCDS will consider and structure the varied, rich extracurricular opportunities available to students within the framework of the School's diverse learning community in order to maximize both their accessibility and impact.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Audit and align collaborative extracurricular activities and academic teams in the Lower, Middle and High Schools (e.g. ranging from reading buddies to Academic Decathlon) to identify specific skills foci and gaps and to invite further student involvement in the refinement of these activities in response to their needs.
- Building upon athletic feedback and surveys, prioritize the development of an MCDS tennis program to complement the expansion of current athletic programming.
- Codify and continue to nurture and expand current partnerships, social opportunities, and use of community resources to enhance and diversify students' academic, artistic, and athletic experiences outside the MCDS environment.
- Continue to review and enhance the summer camp program with a focus on identifying niche programs that reflect the quality of the MCDS academic and extracurricular offerings and provide inviting new opportunities for both current and potential families in our geographic area.

### Initiative Two: Implications of IB Philosophy and Practice for Pre-K-8

MCDS will examine and build on the substantial successes of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Programme, leveraging the IB's most powerful components within the Pre-K-8 curriculum and pedagogy.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Identify faculty, staff, students, and families positioned to engage in the conversation about how best to vertically translate the essential elements of the IB Programme (i.e., Theory of Knowledge (TOK); Extended Essay (EE); Creativity, Action, and Service (CAS); and IB Learner Profile), using a grade-by-grade and division-by-division integration model.
- Continue to monitor and assess the effectiveness of the essential elements of the IB Programme through strategies such as the current exit surveys and test score analysis.



## **Principle Six: Infrastructure for Advancing Mission Communication**

***Rationale:*** An appropriately staffed administrative and advancement infrastructure is paramount to the success of the MCDS mission, ensuring that the MCDS brand is refined, communicated, and understood in the wider Dane County community. Within the MCDS community, a strong administrative advancement team ensures that families have the opportunity to understand the advantages of the exceptional MCDS-family partnership experience, bringing the MCDS mission to life at a personal level for each family.

### Initiative One: Enhance MCDS' Advancement Structure and Culture

MCDS will continue to identify and allocate resources to support the School's development, marketing, and communication initiatives and synthesize these areas into a cohesive advancement program.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Track the revised Master Communications Plan throughout its first year of implementation in 2013-2014, with regular notes and updates allowing for maximum refinement and impact in 2014-2015 and beyond.
- Regularly assess the efficacy of current communication tools (e.g., website, school magazine, e-mail newsletters) in providing clear, relevant, and timely information to MCDS families.
- Build upon the initial launch of the MCDS Alumni Association to ensure ongoing, substantial connections with MCDS graduates.
- Identify and analyze best practices in institutional advancement, planning for the necessary additional staff in marketing, admissions, and development and creating a structure that allows the synergies between and among School administration, marketing, and development to blossom.

### Initiative Two: Formalize An Increasingly Sophisticated Public Relations (PR) Process

MCDS will investigate *pro bono* and formalized PR support as a driver of and support for informal word-of-mouth marketing, the number one way families learn about MCDS.

Representative Tactics:

- Collect ISACS (Independent Schools Association of the Central States) and CASE (Council for the Advancement and Support of Education) data regarding the value of adding *pro bono* PR services relative to recruitment and retention.
- Prioritize opportunities to share information about our Pre-K-12 community, including the success of the MCDS high school.

Initiative Three: Engage in Ongoing Enhancement and Innovation within MCDS' Online Presence.

MCDS will examine and enhance its online presence, including social media, ensuring the quality of content, the usefulness of resources and links, and ease of access for the range of MCDS constituent groups including prospective families.

Representative Tactics:

- Continue to assess and enhance the MCDS website, including the tools utilized for external marketing such as videos, social media, and search engine optimization, to enhance the power of the information and the suite of applications available to families, faculty, and students.
- Increase technology staffing and enhance the tools available to current families and faculty to provide high levels of functionality for routine processes, including a school-wide student information system.
- Ensure that MCDS' online presence always reflects the heart and soul of the institution, namely our mission and community.





## **Principle Seven: Technological Innovation**

***Rationale:*** The world is changing before our eyes; students' mastery of twenty-first century skills is both a given and an educational imperative. A democratic society depends on an informed citizenry, well-versed in the higher-order skills and content knowledge required to make informed judgments about the world around them as well as the communication modes necessary to share, evaluate, and refine its opinions. Twenty-first century educational technology and facilities not only support the advancement and effectiveness of student learning but also provide unique outlets for the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

### Initiative One: Finalize a Shared Technology Vision

MCDS will finalize an educational technology vision statement that is accepted and shared by all constituent groups.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Building upon the work of the Technology Committee from 2011-2012, convene a short-term committee to discuss and finalize a shared technology vision.
- Publish and develop awareness of the Technology Vision Statement to create an environment of shared acceptance.

### Initiative Two: Conduct a Comprehensive Technology Needs Assessment

Before strategic implementation can occur, MCDS will ensure a comprehensive understanding of its current state of technology and future needs.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Conduct an assessment of MCDS' current technology environment and document the following areas: physical and logical network(s), servers, security, back-up and disaster recovery, applications and software licensing, hardware inventory and warranties, current system configurations, and performance analysis.

- Compile interview and survey data from faculty, staff, parents, students, and trustees to further identify future technology goals and needs.

#### Initiative Three: Create a Three-year Technology Implementation Plan

By the start of the 2014-2015 school year, MCDS will create a three-year technology implementation plan in keeping with the MCDS mission and technology vision and goals. The core goal of this plan will be to develop and sustain the essential conditions to effectively leverage technology in learning.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Convene a working-group of stakeholders to build upon the vision statement and needs assessment and contribute to the completion of the final technology implementation plan.
- The final plan should specifically address areas of curriculum (including a scope and sequence of related skills for students), faculty professional development, IT systems, and accountability. Additional areas for consideration would include the use of technology for school administrative and operational purposes.

#### Initiative Four: Research the Ideal Twenty-first Century Library Media Center (LMC)

MCDS will research and bring to life a collaboration and innovation hub for students that will combine the best of an old world library with updated twenty-first century technology.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Research and visit model schools with recently completed LMC's which represent best practice in modern library and technology space creation.
- Integrate exemplars, research, and the MCDS technology needs assessment into the ongoing facility planning process.



## **Principle Eight: Student-Centered Facilities**

***Rationale:*** MCDS has grown from 22 students in the fall of 1997 to more than 360 eager students in 2013-2014. The facilities have grown with us, from the original Yahara Center (that currently houses the Lower School) to the new Middle and High School, completed in the fall of 2005. The vision of double class sections through 12th grade, coupled with the increasing interest and enrollment from families across south-central Wisconsin, underpins the need for careful and comprehensive facilities planning.

### Initiative One: Complete Campus-Wide Needs Assessment

MCDS completed the process of gathering information from the School's constituent groups and creating a summary to inform next steps at the end of the 2012-2013 school year.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Compile interview and focus group data from faculty, staff, parents, and students, identifying common themes and honoring diverse viewpoints.
- Integrate data into a Facility Needs Assessment, clarifying short-term needs as well as the long-term vision for facilities at MCDS. The summary should prioritize the School's needs including new or improved spaces that respond to anticipated programmatic requirements. Ultimate prioritization of facilities projects and resulting capital campaign initiatives rests with the Administration and Board of Trustees.

### Initiative Two: Create a Campus Master Plan in Line with Feasibility Studies

MCDS will create a Campus Master Plan to ensure facilities that further enhance the quality of an MCDS education and meet the expectations and needs of our constituents within the financial means of the institution and community.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Develop the appropriate Board and administrative structure to oversee the school's ongoing facility planning.

- Meet with construction company prospects to share the School's Strategic Plan and Facility Needs Assessment, initiate the campus master planning process, and procure budgetary projections for construction, in coordination with the appropriate finance, facilities, and development committees of the Board.
- Based on preliminary construction proposals and the Facility Needs Assessment, delineate the phases of the construction to meet the School's short-term needs and the long-term vision in line with five-year enrollment and financial projections.



## **Conclusion**

This Strategic Plan builds on the impressive momentum and exceptional educational programming accomplished over the past sixteen years of MCDS' history; the priorities and initiatives outlined respond to the fluid needs of our student body, faculty, staff, and families. Members of the MCDS community have created a culture of excellence that has enhanced the School's reputation and increased its enrollment. This plan is intended to take the MCDS program and experience to the next level for students, families, and employees, further distinguishing the school as Dane County's premier independent school and ensuring a robust future.