



Chicago Friends School: 2018-2021 Strategic Plan

Introduction

Chicago Friends School started when a group of local Quakers, parents, and educators began meeting, planning, and laying the groundwork for a Quaker school in Chicago. In 2010, Chicago Friends School opened as a one-room schoolhouse in the North Center neighborhood of Chicago. By 2016, the school's fifth year of continual operation, Chicago Friends School had grown to 29 students in grades K-5 and added a full-time professional head of school.

Having successfully completed its start-up phase, Chicago Friends School was in a position to begin strategic long-term planning. A Strategic Planning Team of board members, staff members, parents, and external stakeholders considered the school's mission and vision, and from that, formed a plan to guide the school's next phase of growth and development. The team sought and received extensive input from a wide range of stakeholders and community members, studied internal documents, and analyzed neighborhood, city, and national trends. The resulting strategic plan was approved by the full board in Summer 2018. The steps in it are intended to be reached over the next three school years (2018/19 – 2020/21).

Guiding Principles

The strategic planning began with a review of the school's mission, resulting in the refined mission statement below, and development of a vision statement for the school.

Mission Statement

Chicago Friends School — rooted in the Quaker values of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and service — develops the academic skills and strong character that K-8 students need to grow into purposeful lives.

Vision Statement

Chicago Friends School students will graduate with the skills, experiences, and

confidence to bring about a better world. Our supportive and diverse school environment will nurture students to their full academic, creative, and spiritual potential and will build character and love of learning within each student. Chicago Friends School students, graduates, and community members will live Quaker values as they learn to engage with each other and the wider world.

Growth

Growth is the cornerstone of this strategic plan. Our program benefits the students enrolled and the broader community and can help create a kinder future. Put simply, Chicago and the world needs more students educated at Chicago Friends School! We will grow responsibly, preserving the uniqueness and personal nature of the program, while building our community, resources, and presence in the community. The school's unique program and approach should be available to as many students as the school can effectively serve.

Growth enables us to build diversity in our student body and expand and diversify our connections to the broader community. Growth is also crucial from a business perspective. Only by growing our student body can the school reach critical mass that allows for program expansion and improvement. The additional tuition gained from a larger student body will enable crucial program enhancements and improvements, while allowing us to keep the program as affordable as possible.

The strategic goals and strategies outlined below serve growth, but growth is also an input into these goals. The more we grow, the easier it is to improve the experience, capacity, and visibility of the school.

The team identified seven issue areas crucial to the next phases of the school's growth: program, diversity, facilities, human capacity, financial capacity, visibility, and professional recognition. In this document, these areas of growth are grouped into three overarching goals: Experience, Capacity, and Visibility / Recognition.

Goal 1: Experience

The first goal is to continually improve and enhance the Chicago Friends School experience for students and their families. Program enhancements, increasing the school's diversity, and facilities improvements are all part of this goal.

Program

Our instructional program is the heart of all that we do. Its uniqueness and quality are crucial to realizing Chicago Friends School's mission and vision and preparing students for academic, interpersonal and life successes. We are also considering the educational

needs of our expanding age range of the school in our program goals. During this plan's period, we will graduate our first class of 8th graders!

The school will implement the following strategies for instructional program improvements:

- Expand arts, science, and foreign language offerings to include more variety and more frequent instruction (School year 2018-2019)
- Hire specialists for arts, language, and science instruction (2019-2021)
- Introduce electives into the middle school program (2020-2021)
- Add amenities and program features to the middle school to help students to be prepared for high school success. These include greater technology infusion, compartmentalized instruction in which students are taught by a team of content specialists rather than a homeroom teacher, introduction of limited standardized testing, and teaching students skills for increased academic independence and responsibility (Beginning 2018-2019)
- Create distinctive program experiences for each grade or grade band that further our mission, provide students with impactful experiences, and are unique to our school. Examples of these may include grade-level challenges, or class trips (2019-2020)
- Grow afterschool programs to include electives, sports, additional arts and other opportunities for student growth (2019-2020).

Diversity

Getting to know, understand, and respect people who come from diverse backgrounds is a crucial part of learning about the world. A diverse student body and staff is not a cosmetic improvement to our school. It is a way of making sure that all students are prepared to live and work as compassionate, informed citizens of the world. Our school's goal is to have racial and socioeconomic diversity that looks more like our Edgewater neighborhood and the city of Chicago as a whole. To attain this, we need to grow our diversity.

Strategies for increasing our diversity are:

- Look critically inward to understand the community's internal assumptions and practices and how they may impact full inclusion of socioeconomically diverse audiences (2018-2019)
- Develop partnerships with diverse community organizations that can help us understand how to foster a loving and diverse community over the long term (2019-2020)
- Fundraise for and launch a program that will work with community partners to recruit a cohort of several low-income students of color of the same grade level (2020-2021).

Facilities

Facilities impact the experience in many ways. A well-cared-for facility helps students and families feel valued, calm and supported in learning, and helps attract new families. Well-equipped instructional spaces provide teachers with the materials and space they need to best serve program goals.

Strategies for facilities are:

- Fresher and more attractive learning environment (2018 – 2019)
- Dedicated, equipped spaces for instruction in subjects such the arts and science (2018-2019)
- Improved technological infrastructure for school operations and for learning, including enhanced phone and internet systems (2018-2019)
- Longer-term space planning to extend beyond the period of this plan, taking into account our needs as the school grows. (2020-2021)

Goal 2: Capacity

The second goal is to increase the school's financial and human capacity.

Human Capacity

Human energy powers the school. Our small staff, board, and many volunteers contribute countless hours and invaluable professional expertise to the school, and we must make sure that the school maximizes the impact of their time and energy. We will help volunteers be most effective and increase paid staff in areas where the school has need for specific expertise or focused effort.

We also need to make sure that we recruit and retain the best talent by offering competitive compensation packages.

Strategies for increasing our human capacity are:

- Add expert support staff in marketing and admissions (2018-2019)
- Add additional capacity to support finance, operations, and facilities (2019-2020)
- Create a stronger volunteer culture, re-organize volunteers and committees to best use volunteer time and talent (2018-2020)
- Strategically grow our board to increase the school's connections, pool of knowledge, and fundraising capacity (2018-2021)
- Phase-in increased benefits and compensation for full time staff (2019-2021).

Financial Capacity

Chicago Friends School is committed to affordability, while also understanding that strong and expanded programming requires adequate resources to happen. Financial planning will enable the school to grow securely and strategically. Philanthropy gives us seed money to incubate and grow new program improvements.

Strategies for improving our financial resources are:

- Create a long-term financial plan that allows us to be debt-free by 2020 and build reserves, beginning in 2021,
- Re-structure tuition to maintain affordability but also ensure that revenues allow us to continue to deliver and expand high-quality programs (2018-2020),
- Work with financial professionals to further strengthen financial oversight and management, including annual audit, beginning in 2018
- Create a stronger internal culture of philanthropy, beginning in 2018
- Launch a more robust fundraising program, including major gifts and planned giving (2019-2020).

Goal Three: Visibility and Reputation

The third goal is to increase visibility to potential new Chicago Friends School parents, and build an informed awareness of what we have to offer in the Chicago educational landscape. We will also enhance our reputation through memberships, and achieve accreditation through professional organizations.

Visibility

Visibility is crucial to the school's growth. Chicago families may be looking for a school like ours and not know about Chicago Friends School. This strategic plan will increase our visibility in the Edgewater community and in the broader Chicago independent school landscape. Careful planning, brand differentiation, identification of target audiences, and examining our market position are all part of this.

Strategies for increasing our visibility include:

- Create and implement a robust, comprehensive marketing plan, including targets for student and family engagement and matriculation (2018-2019)
- Create a brand identity that differentiates us and that communicates these differentiators (2018-2019)
- Continue to establish our reputation among Edgewater parents and in the community (Ongoing)
- Develop deeper relationships with local preschools and other potential "feeder" schools (Ongoing).

Professional Recognition

Professional membership and accreditation signifies a level of professionalism and quality to the community. It assures parents that their child's education is taken seriously in the broader educational community. It enhances reputation and trust.

This strategic plan focuses on three key levels of professional recognition. Within the next three years, the school will:

- Achieve full membership status in the Friends Council on Education (Completed in 2018),
- Attain a higher level of recognition from the Illinois State Board of Education (2019-2020)
- Initiate the process for Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS) accreditation (2020-2021).

Plan into Action

According to John M. Bryson, a national expert in strategic planning for nonprofits, "strategic planning should promote wise strategic thought, action, and learning." With this in mind, the school's Strategic Planning Team sought not just to produce a strategic plan, but to foster strategic thinking throughout Chicago Friends School and build it into the school's culture and day-to-day operations. As a result, when the team and board identified a priority strategy that could be implemented right away, they did not wait for the full strategic planning document to be completed, but instead took action. For example, a marketing specialist has already been hired, and Friends Council membership has already been attained. To monitor growth, the Strategic Planning Team, head and board will be making periodic check-ins, measuring progress along these goals.

We look forward to implementing the above strategies and achieving the goals in partnership with the school community.