



Tesseract School
Engaging Minds. Inspiring Dreams.



Preparing Students Today
FOR SUCCESS TOMORROW

A LETTER FROM PEGGY STEMMLER, CHAIR OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

In the fall of 2007, the Board of Trustees embarked on the process of renewing and updating the strategic direction of the school. Over the preceding few years, Tesseract had made extraordinary strides, fulfilling the goals of our existing plan, which had been approved in fall 2004. In the interim, Tesseract was growing not only in enrollment, but also in scope – we were in the process of developing our new Shea campus and also our new upper school. The time had come to reflect on the past several years' work, refresh and re-evaluate our vision in light of Tesseract's growth and renew our commitment to the future.

The formal process began in May 2007, when Trustee Paul Domingue led a group of 30 parents, faculty members, administrators and trustees through the process of reviewing and updating Tesseract's mission and vision statements to reflect our expansion to a preschool through grade 12 institution.

In late September 2007, 48 parents, faculty members, administrators and trustees met for a two-day workshop. Using the updated mission and vision statements, the group reflected on the Tesseract School Core Values and brainstormed ideas for the future. The results of that work affirmed the success of our existing plan, and generated new strategies to strengthen and expand the Tesseract vision.

Following the direction from that workshop, the Planning Committee met over the course of the ensuing months, fleshing out ideas, and creating the strategies, action steps and priorities to make the ideas a reality.

The plan was approved by the Board in October 2008.

The Board of Trustees would like to express gratitude to everyone who contributed his or her time and ideas to the process. As the Strategic Planning Committee Chair, I wish to particularly thank the members of the committee, who contributed an extraordinary amount of time to help expand the ideas, principles and specifics that took thoughts generated in our planning workshop and made them into concrete actionable strategies.

Planning Committee:

Kathleen Ferris	Peggy Stemmler	Chris LaBonte	Robert Wilder
Mike Rucki	Kyla Johnson	Jessie Tolman-Soto	Linda Pastori
Allison Grady	Nigel Taplin	Kathleen Dunne Millar	Kate Wilkes

A LETTER FROM NIGEL TAPLIN, HEAD OF SCHOOL

We are proud to unveil Tesseract School's second strategic plan in five years, signaling our extraordinary progress as a premier independent school. Over the past five years, Tesseract's mission has broadened to include the expansion of our program to an early childhood through grade 12 school with an emphasis on educating students to excel in college and beyond. In the midst of this growth, including the addition of a second campus, Tesseract remains committed to its core educational philosophy of offering a program that engages and inspires each student to excel in his or her daily life at Tesseract.

The two essential ingredients of excellent schools are the attraction and retention of the highest quality educators and the maintenance of optimal teacher-to-student ratios. To support these components and to provide the breadth and depth of program essential to the Tesseract School Mission and our school's competitiveness, Tesseract will continue to strengthen its ability to support the program with prudent fiscal management, strong operational leadership and philanthropic stewardship.

Our strategic plan, *Preparing Students Today for Success Tomorrow*, serves as a guide for us for the next few years as Tesseract continues to grow and mature. It asks us to stay true to our core values of academic excellence and respect for the individual by continuing to strengthen and build a community that encourages cooperation and respects diversity. It urges us to inspire our students to succeed with outstanding faculty members that are given the freedom and support to expand and share their expertise. And, it encourages our students—as ethical and compassionate citizens and leaders—to make decisions that consider the world in which they live and the needs of future generations.

The open exchange of ideas within a diverse community is necessary to moral, intellectual and societal growth. To that end, Tesseract School nurtures a rich intellectual environment embracing respect for individual talents, perspectives and opinions. Further, Tesseract strives to create a diverse community of individuals from different racial, cultural, religious and economic backgrounds. Tesseract School offers academically talented students a rich, integrated curriculum in a collaborative and respectful environment. We aim to stimulate creative inquiry, enlightened thought, and the synthesis of diverse ideas necessary for an increasingly interdependent and changing world. We encourage students to test themselves athletically, express themselves artistically, and participate actively as members of our community and the greater society. We cultivate in all members of our institution high personal expectations and integrity, consensus building, respect for individual worth and dignity, stewardship of the natural world and dedication to service of others. We seek to instill a love of learning and foster lives of noble purpose.

GOAL - EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Support our faculty and its passion for teaching by encouraging the use of research-driven professional development to create a stimulating, relevant learning environment.

STRATEGIES / TACTICS

1 Attract, retain and foster educators who share their passion for learning for their subject matter and their other interests.

Develop an orientation and retention program for new faculty.

Establish a compensation task force to formally review faculty compensation packages at least every three years.

Monitor staff turnover and hold exit interviews for staff members who leave.

Expand educational innovation grant program.

Establish a program of educators as “experts” to train other faculty and present workshops within Tesseract and the education community.

- i. Survey the faculty regarding interests and strengths as part of the Oct/Nov goal setting meetings with division directors.
- ii. Encourage a shared leadership based on strengths, interests and goals of individual staff members.
- iii. Discuss a three-year plan in which faculty identify a specific area in which they will become an expert/presenter.

Support staff development by scheduling time for team-building, peer observation, horizontal and vertical planning, cross-curricular lesson planning and sharing ideas.

2 Sustain a professional culture of collegiality – two campuses, but one school.

Conduct educator peer-observation opportunities to share effective learning strategies.

Provide dedicated time for cross-grade and subject planning of new themes.

Conduct faculty/admin/staff retreat at the beginning and end of the year.

- i. Start of year - focus on team-building.
- ii. End of year - review the year's processes and the vision for next year.

3 Establish a culture of research and planning as a fundamental prerequisite for distinguished teaching.

Design professional development in a collaborative process which engages the entire faculty as follows:

- i. Research Best Practices.
- ii. Document applications at Tesseract School.
- iii. Take recommendations for additions/changes/deletions to the existing program(s).

Encourage shared leadership to enhance faculty development and collaboration.

Further develop an integrated growth and development plan for each educator that combines school mission with individual goals and professional development.

Charge the Professional Development Committee with developing a long-term plan for professional development and in-service days based on staff needs and feedback.





4 Establish the program as a model for innovative education in the Valley.

Require two faculty from each division to connect with innovative schools via a minimum of two exchanges/site visits within the academic year. Cycle through so each faculty member fulfills requirement.

Research and report on instructional strategies using scholarly and proven research on the brain and learning.

Explore the possibility of forming learning collaboratives with schools in the Arizona Association of Independent Schools (AAIS).

Integrate the philosophy and management of Tesseract's after-school and summer school programs with Tesseract's general academic philosophy.

Increase involvement in innovative organizations such as Coalitions of Essential Schools, Forum for Education in Democracy, Northeast Foundation for Children (RC/RD) and other professional development and network organizations such as ASCD, NAEYC, NMTA, NAIS and AAIS.

5 Establish Tesseract as a leader in the integration of sustainability and global education in the Valley.

Create a task force to integrate concepts of sustainability into curriculum and school policies and practices.

- i. Include sustainability activities and standards in curriculum maps.
- ii. Document existing all-school activities and curricula related to sustainability.
- iii. Develop recommendations for additions, changes and deletions to existing all-school curriculum.

Create a task force to develop curriculum and school policies/practices integrating global education into curriculum.

- i. Include sustainability activities and standards in curriculum maps.
- ii. Document existing all-school activities and curricula related to globalism.
- iii. Develop recommendations for additions, changes and deletions to existing all-school curriculum.

6 Ensure and optimize accreditation of the educational program.

- i. Maintain accreditation from the North Central Association (NCA).
- ii. Maintain accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
- iii. Seek accreditation from the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISASW).

7 Establish strategic partnerships with other schools in lower and higher education.

Explore opportunities to provide Tesseract's programs as a model and resource for other schools in the area.

Explore opportunities for higher education to collaborate with the faculty.

Continue AAIS membership and active participation/collaboration with educators at other independent schools.

Establish periodic communication and possibly visitations with educators from innovative and premier independent schools.

Continue to fund and promote presentations by and attendance of our educators and administrators at state and national conferences.

GOAL - ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Offer students a distinguished, integrated curriculum that cultivates creative inquiry, enlightened/independent thought, and the synthesis of diverse ideas in an increasingly interdependent and changing world.

STRATEGIES / TACTICS

1 Ensure the educational program engages students in relevant and meaningful curriculum.

Document examples of coordination between current events and curricular content.

Document that the Tesseract curriculum incorporates a broad range of experiences including the visual and performing arts, service learning, and opportunities for students to learn from the greater community, e.g. field trips, enrichment programs, visiting speakers, etc.

Work with educators to connect the real world with their classrooms.

2 Ensure the educational program establishes a strong foundation in the core skills.

Establish a process that compares Tesseract's core skills expectations with state and national standards.

Use national-level standardized tests to assist with the assessment of the core skills.

Review student assessments to improve student performance.

Review curriculum across grades/subjects to ensure curriculum coordination and scaffolding.

3 Maximize the collaborative teaching model.

Include collaboration (cross-grade or cross-curriculum) as a professional expectation for each educator and schedule common planning time for the development of collaborative projects.

4 Develop our understanding of the elements that prepare students to excel in the 21st century.

Create an advisory group of business and other professionals to help anticipate and identify future requirements for success.

Explore distance-learning opportunities for students—both internal and external to Tesseract.

Offer resources and experiences that help children connect with each other through sharing, thinking and learning about the world around them.

Explore faculty and student exchange programs.

Develop relationships with schools in China and Spanish-speaking countries; expand as resources allow.

Ensure that technology integration reflects what students will use in real-world situations.

Have an established in-house learning support program for our students with learning specialists and counselors.

5 Create an educational facility establishing Tesseract as a leader in the community.

Create classroom spaces that maximize student inquiry and collaboration.

Provide opportunities for the community to learn from Tesseract's classroom design and function.

Create long-term plans for incorporating "green" policies into school events and practices.





GOAL - COMMUNITY

Foster an ethical community that embraces diverse backgrounds and talents, cultivates high personal expectations and integrity, promotes the pursuit of excellence, and recognizes the consequences of decisions and actions.

STRATEGIES / TACTICS

1 Strengthen and further develop the collaborative relationships between and among faculty and staff, students and parents, and the greater community.

Form a committee of representatives from each division to plan interactions or events between campuses.

Identify school-wide community events for faculty and staff at the start of every year.

Formalize all staff professional development at least once per month combining the staff from both campuses.

Offer opportunities for young children to be with older children to create a community that promotes social success.

Foster community engagement.

Ensure Tesseract events include opportunities for early childhood – 12 levels.

2 Develop a school culture that invites and embraces diversity.

Form a diversity task force to develop a plan to attract and retain socioeconomic, cultural, and ethnic diversity within the student body, faculty and staff.

- i. Assess our current level of diversity sensitivity.
- ii. Work with the community to create an environment where diverse students are welcomed and can experience success.
- iii. Establish staff/parent training and counseling programs.
- iv. Propose a scholarship program.
- v. Propose a transportation plan.
- vi. Develop a marketing strategy that targets a diverse population.
- vii. Plan visits to public schools to encourage student referrals.

3 Continue to integrate research-based developmentally responsive programs.

Identify a developmentally-responsive program model for the upper school.

Support and incorporate the program practices into yearly planning and practice throughout the year.

4 Help students discover their roles and become active participants within the community.

Support opportunities for service learning and community service/community engagement, offer parent involvement as appropriate.

Explore an internship program for upper school students.

Require community service hours in the upper school.

5 Assist families in understanding and facilitating a developmentally-appropriate role in their children's education.

Ensure that faculty have a unified approach to the developmentally appropriate stages of parental involvement in the school.

Continue to offer parent classes - instruction, behavior, child development.

Enhance and encourage alumni involvement.

GOAL - SUSTAINABILITY AND STEWARDSHIP

Strengthen the human, physical and financial resources to nurture and advance Tesseract's mission, distinctiveness and pre-eminence in an increasingly competitive environment.

STRATEGIES / TACTICS

1 Ensure that the school is financially stable and sustainable.

Analyze class size and student-teacher ratios.

- i. Survey NAIS schools on student-teacher ratios.
- ii. Research studies to determine optimum class size.
- iii. Present recommendations to the Board for action in 2009-2010 budget.

Create a three-year faculty and staff compensation plan that positions Tesseract as competitive in the Valley and independent schools in the southwest.

- i. Obtain data from the National Association of Independent Schools, the Independent Schools of the Southwest, the Arizona Association of Independent Schools and local public school districts.
- ii. Present recommendations to the Board for action in 2010-2011 budget.

Develop a long-term philanthropic giving program which will significantly contribute to achieving a goal of 15-20 percent of operating revenue by 2013.

- i. Recruit key event/campaign chairs and Board of Trustees for a development committee.
- ii. Create a five-year strategic plan and yearly calendar for development activities.
- iii. Design and implement a recruitment, training and execution plan specific to all fund-raising events and campaigns.

Develop a five-year financial model to ensure financial stability and sustainability.

- i. Develop benchmarks from the National Association of Independent Schools data—"stats-on-line."

Consider:

- Phoenix metropolitan demographic data to guide enrollment projections
- Faculty/staff compensation goals
- Fund-raising projections

Achieve Breaking New Ground Capital Campaign goals.

2 Address demographic sustainability to ensure long-term stability.

Form a marketing task force to further enhance the school's reputation with the development a multi-year marketing plan.

- i. Study Phoenix metropolitan demographic data.
- ii. Review messaging and marketing vehicles.

Form a diversity task force to develop a plan to attract and retain socio-economic diversity within the student body, faculty and staff.

- i. Utilize NAIS People of Color initiatives to guide the process.
- ii. Study the work of other independent schools.
- iii. Develop a financial plan with development, marketing and admissions.

3 Ensure that the Board is active, engaged and focused on strategic direction.

Establish a plan to attract and retain trustees who are active, diverse and philanthropic.

Establish an annual Board work plan/ Board goals.

- i. Schedule work/study sessions that cover each of the top three to five issues into Board meetings (one issue per meeting).
- ii. Schedule a board retreat each year to set goals.

4 Create an educational facility establishing Tesseract as a leader in the community.

Create plan for the improvement of Doubletree facilities.

- i. Hold focus groups for community feedback.
- ii. Identify a professional to develop a space plan.
- iii. Create a timeline for funding and work to be completed.

Build, maintain and support both campuses through a comprehensive, systematic and environmentally responsible facilities management plan.

Incorporate and operate a sustainable, environmentally-responsible campus building system as feasible.

Create time frame for Phase 2 Shea build-out.



Mission Statement

Tesseract fosters each student's intellect, love of learning, and strength of character in an innovative and collaborative environment. We prepare students to excel in college and beyond, lead lives of purpose, and become ethical and compassionate citizens with a global perspective.