

INTRODUCTION:

Rio Grande School (RGS) is an independent school serving children in preschool through sixth grade. The school is distinguished by its commitment to challenging academics, student-centered learning, and social and emotional development. RGS's goal is for each student to think critically, analytically, and creatively; apply what they learn to real-world situations; and have a strong sense of who he or she is in the world.

Following my arrival as Head of School in the summer of 2014, the Rio Grande School Board of Trustees launched a strategic planning process to articulate a long-term vision for the school, and to identify strategic priorities for achieving that vision. The result is the 2016 – 2019 Strategic Plan, the product of the school's recent re-accreditation process, numerous surveys, parent discussion sessions, and internal and external audits. The purpose is to communicate high-level goals with specific objectives and timeframes that will guide the activities of the administration, faculty, and RGS Board for the next three to five years.

Several principles guided our work:

- First, the strategic-planning process was inclusive. The 2016 – 2019 Strategic Plan reflects input from more than 200 individuals including trustees, faculty, alumni, parents, students, the RGS Board, and external constituents.
- Second, the plan was driven by, and reflective of, RGS's mission and values.
- Third, it was research-based and incorporated the best and latest thinking for Early Childhood-12 education.
- Lastly, it was driven by an objective assessment of the school's strengths and opportunities for improvement, providing clearly defined goals, measurable deliverables, and timeframes. Therefore, each of the pillars of the Strategic Plan has a detailed implementation plan describing the activities, deliverables, and due dates to ensure its success.

I am excited by the opportunity and direction that this strategic plan presents for all of us, and I look forward to working with the extended RGS community bring this vision to reality. RGS will maintain flexibility during plan execution to manage unexpected challenges and capitalize on new opportunities.

Nigel Taplin
Head of School

Mission Statement:

The mission of Rio Grande School is to challenge each child's intellect, to inspire each child's imagination, and to nurture each child's desire to learn.

Core Values:

Academic Excellence: the foundation of thinking and communication skills, strong habits, and the authentic integration of the arts with core subjects to prepare children for success in the 21st century

Child-Centeredness: the promotion of each child's strengths, interests, and learning style to foster personal and academic growth

Diversity and Inclusivity: the respect for human differences in race, culture, ethnicity, religion, lifestyle, and socioeconomic background

Character Development: the empowerment to serve others, and the recognition that children learn best when social and emotional competencies are integrated with academic skills

Environmental Stewardship: the nurturing of the sense of responsibility for the natural world that the name of our school implies

Global Perspective: the confidence to navigate through international cultures to create new ideas and different ways of perceiving the world

Strong Relationships: the leadership of outstanding educators partnering with committed parents to guide children on their journeys

Value Proposition:

Overview: Rio Grande School educates early childhood and elementary school students in a student-centered environment that is enriched and academically rigorous, engaging them to master to their potential the skill areas of reading, writing, math, speaking, and listening. The academic and co-curricular programs combine to guide students to think critically, creatively, and to reflect deeply, inspiring them to be excited lifelong learners, prepared to succeed as emotionally secure individuals and thoughtful, caring members of society.

Transformational Teaching and Learning: Our highly trained and experienced faculty use leading-edge research-based pedagogies, including thematic, project-based approaches to meet the varying needs of all of our learners who are encouraged to inquire and contribute, ensuring that each student thrives and experiences the joys of learning in core and co-curricular subjects.

Relationships: Rio Grande School employs best practices to nurture social, emotional, and intellectual intelligences, creating a culture in which high-quality relationships are integral to each student's personal and academic well-being and to their desire to pursue a fulfilled life.

Pillar 1: Curriculum

Rio Grande School offers challenging academics, combining traditional academic studies with a highly enriched co-curricular program. Our educators' teaching methods focus on student-centered learning and differentiated instruction; RGS's goal is for each student to think critically, analytically, and creatively; apply what they learn to real-world situations; and have a strong sense of who he or she is in the world.

1. Increase our commitment to adventure-based learning, performing arts, and Spanish programs - 2017
2. Define, develop, and promote sixth-grade capstone program to offer a defining culmination year to sixth-graders -- 2017
3. Conduct an in-depth curriculum review to ensure horizontal and vertical alignment of content, skills, competencies, and assessments – 2019
4. Enhance learning engagement through greater emphasis on differentiated instruction, project-based learning, technology, and design thinking -- 2019
5. Further emphasize character development, appreciation of differences, and overall social and emotional development in the curriculum and professional development programs – 2020
6. Critically examine curricula from multiple viewpoints, and include materials that represent various perspectives – 2019

Pillar 2: Faculty

Our faculty is the heart, soul, and backbone of Rio Grande School. Our success depends on our educators, who engage and inspire students daily with skill and dedication. RGS strives to provide an exceptional work environment characterized by a culture of shared values; meaningful professional development opportunities; and competitive salaries and benefits.

1. Implement the Faculty Professional Growth & Development Plan and Faculty Evaluation Program -- 2016
2. Identify, develop, and fund professional-development programs that align with the school and educators' priorities – ongoing
3. Prioritize low student:educator ratios to facilitate students' development of strong, positive relationships with peers and educators, and to promote differentiated instruction -- 2016
4. Foster an inspiring work climate based on the values of collaboration, peer-learning, open communication, and commitment to individual growth and well-being -- 2017

5. Ensure faculty receives competitive compensation -- 2017
6. Improve ethnic and cultural diversity within the faculty when recruitment opportunities arise

Pillar 3: Recruiting, Marketing, Communications

Through systematic outreach and retention, continue to improve the awareness and perception of RGS, and increase inquiry-to-enrollment ratios.

1. Build Rio Grande School's brand perception in the community to more accurately reflect the school's core values and areas of differentiation—rigorous academics, student-centered development, and social-emotional development -- ongoing
2. Increase lead generation through specific strategies to build referrals from existing families, attract relocating families, increase new family participation in RGS auxiliary programs, and improve understanding of RGS's tuition assistance program -- ongoing
3. Improve inquiry-to-enrollment conversion rates to maintain a healthy student population of motivated learners in each grade, with wait pools, ensuring long-term sustainability of the school -- ongoing
4. Ensure that the RGS community represents a broad background of nationalities, cultures, demographics, and socio-economics -- ongoing

Pillar 4: Campus and Facilities

Continue responsible oversight and planning of our campus in order to help RGS further its mission by providing an optimal and safe learning environment.

1. Update Master Plan and prioritize build-out options under various funding scenarios -- 2016
2. Support RGS's commitment to environmental stewardship when conducting facility maintenance, sourcing materials and supplies, and pursuing future construction -- ongoing
3. Ensure long-term maintenance of the entire campus through long-term maintenance schedules and providing a maintenance endowment in the cost of each new building -- ongoing

Pillar 5: Financial Sustainability

Ensure that RGS is positioned for long-term financial health, while funding our ongoing operations and new strategic initiatives.

1. Ensure annual spending aligns with the RGS strategy and tactics, and that each dollar is spent optimally to ensure mission success -- 2016
2. Ensure a balanced budget through a rigorous approach and clear metrics for the annual operating budget with a trustee-approval path required in order to operate outside the defined goal -- 2018
3. Enhance the Development program including annual giving, corporate sponsorships, planned giving, and possible capital campaign -- ongoing
4. Find or generate additional sources of financial aid for Tuition Assistance -- 2018
5. Find alternative sources of sustainable annual revenue beyond tuition -- 2018
6. Ensure the existing infrastructure is protected financially and new strategic initiatives are planned for with regard to budgetary needs -- 2020