

# The Hotchkiss School

# Strategic Priorities

**B**eginning in the summer of 2017, the Board of Trustees, senior administrators, faculty, staff, students, and others in the Hotchkiss community engaged in a strategic planning process to establish key priorities for the coming decade. This work followed a year-long, comprehensive, community-wide process of revising the School's mission statement and setting forth the values of our learning community.

Asked to describe the School's important comparative advantages, all stakeholders in this process cited Hotchkiss's strength as a student-centered learning community that stands for excellence, rooted in a place of rare natural beauty. As stated in the values of our learning community, *"Our residential community — the network of relationships created by the School's people, place, and opportunities — is our most effective means of providing a transformative educational experience, where students may grow and gain a greater understanding of themselves and their responsibilities to others."*

These strategic priorities represent a combination of carefully considered programmatic and capital opportunities that will extend Hotchkiss's comparative advantage as a student-centered learning community in pursuit of excellence, accessible to an even broader range of talented students.

**This is intended as a living document that will guide our choices over the coming decade, and we expect the specifics of the plan will continue to evolve and develop as ideas are tested and new opportunities emerge. The Board of Trustees has made a commitment to review this document on a periodic basis to ensure that our strategic priorities remain most relevant in fulfilling the mission of the School.**

## The Hotchkiss School Mission

### MONITI MELIORA SEQUAMUR

*Guided by each other, let us seek better paths.*

The Hotchkiss School seeks to inspire a diverse range of students who are committed to the betterment of self and society, and to cultivate in them at the highest standards of excellence

*imagination and intellect,  
openness and personal integrity,  
empathy and responsible citizenship*

that they may discover and fulfill their potential as individuals fully engaged in our world.

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## Values of Our Learning Community

The aim of The Hotchkiss School, since its foundation, has been to provide a dynamic environment for teaching and learning, as well as exceptional preparation for future study and fulfilling adult lives. Our residential community—the network of relationships created by the School’s people, place, and opportunities—is our most effective means of providing a transformative educational experience, where students may grow and gain greater understanding of themselves and their responsibilities to others. We believe that a healthy and inclusive learning community nourishes students physically, emotionally, and intellectually; fosters joy in learning and living with others; and ensures that all feel safe, seen, and supported.

All members of the Hotchkiss community have a role in sustaining this environment. Therefore, we expect all to

- commit to high standards of scholarship and personal conduct;
- open their minds and hearts to the views and experiences of others, creating space for all to belong and to thrive;
- practice the values that nurture healthy relationships: respect, honesty, and compassion in particular;
- risk and reflect in the pursuit of continual growth; and
- exercise responsible citizenship through local and global engagement, service, and environmental stewardship.



## Priority One:

# Access and Affordability

## Increasing Our Financial Aid Endowment

Our commitment to ensuring access for talented students began with Maria Bissell Hotchkiss, the School's founder, who insisted on providing scholarships to local students whose families could not afford the cost of tuition. **To honor that legacy, fulfill our mission, and remain relevant in what has become an increasingly competitive environment, we aim to raise the percentage of boarding and day students receiving financial aid from 33 to 51 percent by 2028.** That increase will bring us more in line with our closest competitors, acknowledging that they, too, will continue to strengthen their financial aid programs.

In 2017-18, our six closest competitors offered 30 to 47 percent of their boarding students financial aid, while Hotchkiss provided 29 percent with aid. In addition, more than half of those competitors gave full aid to 18 to 21 percent of their aid recipients, while Hotchkiss granted only 9 percent of boarders full financial-aid packages.

According to The Association of Boarding Schools (TABS), American boarding schools face a continued decline in domestic, full-pay families. Demand from this segment has declined from between 1 and 1.5 percent per year over the past 15 years. Inevitably, this affects the overall caliber and quality of the student body. While Hotchkiss is fortunate to have a robust international applicant pool, domestic students currently constitute 85 percent of our student population. We must build the endowment for financial aid to ensure that the quality and diversity of our domestic student body is not compromised by the shrinking pool of financially capable families.

The market-research firm Stamats conducted a comprehensive study in 2017-18 to understand how key stakeholders — students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, and



prospective families — perceive Hotchkiss. When asked about criteria for school selection, all constituency groups gave Hotchkiss the lowest possible rating for cost and affordability. It is abundantly clear that the **affordability of a Hotchkiss education** is the leading strategic concern we face.

We must also continue to provide a reasonable level of non-tuition support to ensure that students who receive financial aid can fully participate in the Hotchkiss experience. Non-tuition aid would cover, for example, the cost of books and supplies, participation in international travel programs, internships, and a range of transformational experiential learning opportunities. While we currently offer some non-tuition support, we need to increase those resources so that all students, regardless of socioeconomic background, can take advantage of the opportunities available to them. For domestic families

in need of substantial financial aid, the availability of that extra support may influence their decision to send their child to Hotchkiss.

The caliber and diversity of the student body affects the learning experience for all. We are currently at risk that over time, the quality of learning at Hotchkiss will diminish as a function of the decreasing number of highly talented applicants who can afford to attend. Perhaps counterintuitively, based on the experience of other schools, we anticipate that our yield on the most talented *full-pay* candidates will increase as we strengthen our commitment to financial aid: the brightest students tend to seek out the most talented, diverse peer group.



*Priority Two:*

# Strengthening Hotchkiss as a Student-Centered Learning Community

## Better Paths in Teaching and Learning: Advising and the Academic Program

Learning at Hotchkiss is not limited to the classroom. As a residential school, our intent is to foster a community that supports learning and growth in all areas of student life. At the heart of this mission are the mentoring relationships between faculty and students, relationships that define a student's experience at Hotchkiss and shape the memories of Hotchkiss graduates. Hotchkiss faculty members don't just teach; they act *in loco parentis*, serving as role models and mentors to their students, often for years beyond their time together on campus.

We take great care in the recruitment of talented faculty, individuals who are committed to continued professional and personal growth, knowing that their engagement and lifelong learning is integral to the vitality and strength of the learning community at Hotchkiss.

We know that students thrive academically when they feel a strong sense of safety and belonging, when they're given time and space to create, try new things, fail, and persist.

To create an environment where both students and faculty can become their best, we will focus attention on the following aspects of the Hotchkiss experience:

**A more consistent, intentional, and thoughtful approach to student advising.**

Faculty and staff members play a critical mentorship role as students navigate their adolescent years, and students tend to thrive when they have a clear sense of direction and purpose. To ensure all students feel safe, seen, and supported, we will enhance support for faculty advisors, with reallocated time, more professional development, and regular feedback so that they are best equipped to guide students as they live and learn at Hotchkiss. We plan to define the advisor role comprehensively and clearly, establish systems of accountability to ensure that students are well served by their advisors, and provide faculty with the appropriate tools and training to enable their continued growth.



**Experience-centered, project-focused, and place-based learning** will play a stronger role in the curriculum through the development of upper-level research courses, the expansion of our STEM offerings, and strategic partnerships with colleges, universities, and other institutions, both in the U.S. and abroad. These initiatives will allow Hotchkiss students to make connections and explore real-world problem-solving opportunities that broaden their perspective and introduce them to new ways of thinking. International programs will be increasingly focused in this direction, as well.

This approach will also help us realize the full potential of our unique natural surroundings, including the Beeslick Brook Woods, streams, ponds, wetlands, Fairfield Farm, and the biomass facility, through further integration of environmental studies in interdisciplinary and experiential coursework.

**Time for teachers and students to collaborate and experiment.** We aim to create more opportunities and time for faculty to collaborate on teaching and curriculum development within and across departments. We aim to introduce greater flexibility in the overall schedule to enable more experimentation within the curriculum, including the possibility of a trimester system, with an emphasis on experiential education and field-based coursework in a possible summer term. In order to make this a reality, we intend to review how faculty members spend time engaging with students and consider re-allocating duties based on individual

interests and abilities, which will entail adding full and part-time coaching and dormitory faculty positions. Additionally, we will recast the department head role as a 10-month position, allowing more time for curriculum development and constructive feedback and evaluation to support teachers' professional growth.

**Expand summer opportunities for experiential learning that take advantage of our natural surroundings.** We plan to pilot a for-credit course for Hotchkiss students in Lakeville during summer 2019. This course will take advantage of Lakeville's natural setting, with a particular emphasis on the sciences — including biology, limnology, geography, and an interdisciplinary study of food systems (agroecology).

**The Summer Faculty Symposium** will be extended into the school year and expanded to include teachers from other schools. The goal is to develop student-centered teaching practices relevant to all classrooms and disciplines.

**A Summer Teaching Fellowship** will be created to attract faculty from underrepresented backgrounds. We will also move beyond conventional recruitment channels and strategies to deepen pools of prospective faculty from underrepresented backgrounds.

**Faculty and staff professional development will emphasize diversity and inclusion,** with a particular focus on improving intercultural understanding and advancing inclusivity in all facets of School life.

**Visiting scholars** will be brought to campus to work with faculty, staff, and students to expose them to relevant research about teaching and learning.

**A more inclusive, global curriculum that reflects the world our students come from and will enter upon graduation.** In each discipline, a goal is for the curriculum to be informed by an understanding of a multitude of cultures, ideas, and principles, not solely by an American perspective. To achieve and sustain this, we aim to support members of the faculty in developing greater understanding of their disciplines beyond the U.S. To that end, we will focus on building relationships between Hotchkiss faculty and their counterparts in other parts of the world. We will also host on-campus seminars led by national and international leaders in a variety of fields and sponsor both short-term (one to two weeks) and long-term (semester or year) visiting scholars. We will bring in outside speakers, including alumni and parents, who are creative, innovative, and independent thinkers in diverse fields, and underwrite colloquia in which faculty members can present their work to colleagues to encourage interdisciplinary learning.

**A more deliberate and cohesive approach to integrating technology into the curriculum.** We aim to further incorporate technology into the academic program as a medium for creativity, experimentation, and real-world problem solving by increasing time for faculty professional development and bolstering programmatic support of the Class of 2017 EFX Lab, noting that the EFX Lab is but one creative node on campus. We aim to endow the position of EFX Lab director and a program budget, which will allow students to take full advantage of the lab's resources and help them realize their potential as creative problem-solvers. In addition, as noted earlier, we aim to pursue strategic partnerships with universities and other institutions to create more opportunities for student research and faculty collaboration.







## Affirming Our Core Commitment to the Residential Program: Strengthening Community Life in the Dining Hall and Dormitories

**Our students come from all over the country and the world. While they're at Hotchkiss, their dormitory becomes their shared home — a vibrant community in which students from all backgrounds can find a place of safety, rest, and fun; develop a sense of individuality and independence; and build connections with one another that last well beyond their time at the School. To create a safe, comfortable, and nurturing environment for all of our students, we must address the following programmatic and structural needs:**

**Ensure that dorm faculty have the appropriate time, structure, and support to create meaningful and effective programming in their dormitories.** We recognize that being a dorm head is an intense commitment of time and energy. To better accommodate those demands, the dorm head position will be expanded from a nine-month to a 10-month role. In addition, we plan to review the range of dorm head responsibilities and explore possibilities for relieving some of the tasks (e.g., purchasing snacks for dorm gatherings) by delegating those responsibilities to other campus personnel, ensuring that dorm heads have the time and energy to be present for their students and the other dorm faculty in their buildings.

We aim to increase and enhance training of dorm faculty, with a focus on adolescent development, wellness, and addressing implicit bias. We will also work with dorm heads to establish community standards and provide constructive feedback to the faculty in their buildings.

**Review the administrative structure of residential life and student life to ensure that dorm faculty, advisors, co-curricular advisors, and coaches receive consistent professional training, support, and feedback.** The goal of this organizational review is to provide a more cohesive experience for students as they navigate their time at Hotchkiss. As part of that review, we will consider how best to coordinate communications with parents and among faculty, coaches, and advisors to support the students in their care.

**Renovate the Dining Hall to maximize its potential as a hub of community life.** Originally built in 1947, when Hotchkiss's enrollment was 320 students, the dining hall has changed little, with minimal improvements to the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems. Mealtimes remain critically important to building a sense of community and fellowship, but the quality of the dining experience at Hotchkiss has suffered for lack of upgrades. As part of a larger initiative to strengthen community life, the dining hall needs to be thoroughly renovated to provide a warm, welcoming, and comfortable space for meals, conversation,

and community gatherings. The proposed renovation increases seating capacity to 525 to enable planned, seated meals for students, faculty, and staff. The plan also includes an efficient, modern kitchen and changes the servery to create better flow and allows us to highlight the farm-to-table and other distinctive elements of our dining program.

**Physical improvements and renovations to our older residence halls to ensure a more consistent experience across campus.** Each of our four oldest dorms (Memorial, Coy, Tinker and Buehler) has gone at least 35 years without a major renovation (55 years in the case of Memorial Hall). Structurally, the buildings are sound, but almost all other aspects need to be upgraded or replaced to keep them safe, efficient, and comfortable for students. The major heating, plumbing, and electrical systems in these four buildings have exceeded their useful life, and we are currently at risk of a major failure, which would be highly disruptive to School life and more expensive to remedy. As we upgrade those systems, we will carry out renovations to the buildings to provide appealing common spaces for students and attractive, well-designed apartments for faculty families.

## Athletics: Enhancing Strength and Leadership Beyond the Classroom

Hotchkiss is committed to providing a well-rounded experience that offers all students the opportunity to participate in competitive or recreational sports and develop a lifelong interest in wellness, physical fitness, and the outdoors. The athletic program is guided by the same values that shape other aspects of School life: integrity, respect for others, and the highest standards of personal conduct, on and off the field. Through teamwork, mentorship, collaboration, and the experience of winning and losing, students gain confidence, self-discipline, self-awareness, and a sense of shared responsibility.

### *All Athletics*

**Review and strengthen the evaluation process for all coaches at both the varsity and non-varsity levels.** We aim to create a more cohesive evaluation process for coaches and connect those evaluations to overall faculty evaluations.

**Provide leadership development for team captains.** To reinforce the lessons students learn on the field and help team captains become stronger leaders, we aim to create defined opportunities for leadership development throughout the year.

**Expand the John R. Chandler Fitness Center to promote wellness for all.** During peak times, the fitness center can become overcrowded. To better accommodate all students, we propose an expansion of the fitness center within the existing footprint of the Mars Athletic Center by repurposing existing and underutilized space in the building. This will enable us to add more equipment to ensure better flow.

### *Non-Varsity Athletics (includes junior varsity, thirds, and club sports)*

**Explore the possibility of adding or substituting new team sports on a trial basis to encourage wider participation in athletics.** By expanding the menu of options available to students who are not specialized athletes, we can build a more inclusive culture of well-being and physical fitness. For varsity athletes, having more varied opportunities can encourage them to try something new.

### *Varsity Athletics*

**Making the varsity coaching responsibility a 10-month position.** As youth sports become more specialized, varsity head coaches must spend an increasing amount of time recruiting student-athletes, attending showcases throughout the year (particularly during the summer), and keeping in touch with coaches at the college and university level. This changing landscape requires us to re-think the time we expect varsity head coaches to spend on coaching-related duties

versus their other commitments (classroom teaching, residential, advising). We expect this will entail making the varsity coaching responsibility a 10-month position. In conjunction, the athletic directors will work with the dean of admission to define specific recruiting goals and provide head coaches with the feedback and support to achieve those goals.

**Undertake an overall athletics planning process.** The goal of the review will be to identify our strengths, prioritize programs, and establish a plan that will attract the top student-athletes to Hotchkiss. For each sport, Athletics will work with Admission to develop a detailed plan for identifying, admitting, and enrolling the most competitive student-athletes.







## Opportunities for Deeper Learning: Strengthening the Co-Curricular Program

The richness of the co-curricular program directly affects student learning and growth, particularly in terms of leadership and character development. Given the demands of academic life, co-curricular time is vital for our students; it allows them to explore, pursue their own interests, and develop a sense of agency and empowerment. Co-curricular programming also provides an opportunity for students to connect with each other and with the world beyond Hotchkiss through community service, civic engagement, and independent projects undertaken with the guidance of a faculty or staff member. Our goal is to offer a range of high-quality co-curricular learning opportunities that promote teamwork, leadership, creativity, and wellness, as well as an appreciation for the School's natural setting.

**Strengthen place-based co-curricular offerings and create an outdoor orientation program for incoming students.** Hotchkiss has a rich history of utilizing the surrounding landscape as a classroom and a place for adventure. Woods Squad, limnology courses, and nature writing are all part of the School's tradition of connecting with the outdoors in ways that develop skills and an appreciation for the natural world. Current programs would benefit from an organizing structure that aligns them for greater efficiency, coherence, and risk management. We also aim to create a new-student outdoor orientation program, which would provide them with an opportunity to bond, hone leadership skills, build self-reliance, and develop a connection with the School's natural setting.

**Continue to develop Fairfield Farm as a place to teach environmental stewardship, sustainable agriculture, and experiential education.** Through the Fairfield Farm Ecosystems and Adventure Team (FFEAT), the Farm offers students the opportunity to engage in hands-on and group work and learn about sustainable agriculture. Recent years have seen significant infrastructure improvements and development at the Farm. A strategic approach to strengthening the educational program would allow for additional distinctive teaching and learning opportunities, such as exploring the Farm's potential as a site for research projects, possibly in partnership with a university, as well as a workshop where students can learn lifelong skills, such as craftwork.

**Expand opportunities for community service, locally and globally.** The St. Luke's Society is the oldest continually operating student club at Hotchkiss, established in 1892. Other traditions and organizations, such as Eco Day, Habitat for Humanity, and Round Square, have emerged more recently, connecting students to service opportunities in the Northwest Corner and around the world. We seek to enhance these kinds of opportunities for students by offering them the time, resources, guidance, and structure to engage in service and to successfully initiate their own service projects. To support this effort, we aim to endow the position of director of community service and civic engagement.

**For more information, please contact:**

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