

Office of the Head of School

Strategic Plan Update

*“Do not be content with what you are, if you want to become what you are not yet.
For where you have grown pleased with yourself, there you will remain...
Always add something more, keep moving forward, always make progress.”*

~ St. Augustine

December 3, 2021

Dear Austin Prep Parents,

St. Augustine said, “God provides the wind. We must raise the sail.” In that spirit, the Board of Trustees approved a five-year strategic plan for Austin Prep in September 2019. The Strategic Plan was formulated with the assistance of a Strategic Planning Committee comprised of various stakeholder groups – parents, past parents, alumni, trustees, and friends. The overarching goal of the Strategic Plan is to keep Austin Prep innovative and in the forefront of Catholic secondary education.

The Strategic Plan is a framework to design a chosen future. It’s also a roadmap that keeps Austin Prep moving in the right direction – growing and thriving through unanticipated and ever-changing aspects of 21st century independent education. When the Board approved the Strategic Plan, no one could have anticipated we’d be living through a pandemic. Predictably, however, Austin Prep continues to be the institution we always imagined it would be – one that rises to meet the challenges of our times.

Austin Prep remains in expansion mode and, in my considered judgment, the growth we have been experiencing for years flows from mission, embodied in veritas, unitas, and caritas. Mission is not another thing on the plate. It is the plate. And when mission is primary, everything that is on the plate grows in excellence. Because of mission, Austin Prep continues to shine and, pandemic notwithstanding, the current academic year is yet another year of growth, momentum, and distinction.

BOARD APPROVED STRATEGIC PLAN ~ 2019-2024

The Strategic Plan contains four broad areas of focus:

- * **Mission and Identity:** Embracing our Augustinian heritage, imprinting the enduring values of veritas, unitas, and caritas on the hearts of students.
- * **Connecting to Our Heritage:** Engaging alumni, parents, and students to safeguard the relationships we build – and have built – through the pursuit of truth, through the outgrowth of community, and through caritas in action, Austin Prep remains a central place where you are welcome and loved.
- * **Mainstays of Financial and Environmental Sustainability:** Broadening our institutional financial well-being through judicious planning, prudent enrollment management, healthy philanthropy, expanding alternate sources of revenue, and providing a secure, state-of-the-art and environmentally responsible campus.
- * **Pillars of Excellence:** Enhancing teaching and learning opportunities through strong faculty professional development, expanding best-in-class educational experiences in liberal arts studies, science, technology, and the arts, preparing students for their next level of education, and enriching the cultural experience by emphasizing globalization, diversity, and inclusion.

STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRESS & UPDATES

Mission & Inclusion

- * Using Catholic social teaching as a strong underpinning, we are preparing students to thrive in a complex and global world, encouraging dialogue, empathy, and love of neighbor – qualities that stay with Austin Prep students throughout their lives.
- * The Daughters of Mary – Bannabikira as they are known in Uganda – joined the Austin Prep community this academic year. The arrival of the Bannabikira Sisters is a blessing and special opportunity to deepen Austin Prep’s connection to a global world, to broaden our horizons and perspectives about culture, race and the lived experiences of others, and to advance the work we do in the Lord’s Vineyard to spread the Kingdom of God. In January, we are anticipating the arrival of two additional Bannabikira Sisters who are working their way through U.S. immigration.
- * Augustinian values continue to be the center of gravity in all our decision-making and all our conversations among students and teachers. Mission remains central to the Austin Prep community.
- * Expanded our partnership with St. Mary’s of the Assumption in Lawrence to support 20 additional families for a total of 60 during the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter seasons.
- * Broadened liturgical programming with additional prayer services, including regular Liturgies for Peace and Justice.
- * Increasing student-led support of a mission-aligned charity, St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, where families [never receive a bill](#) for “treatment, travel, housing, or food.”
- * World Language Department expanded service projects, establishing student-translator opportunities at nursing homes and hospitals.
- * Increased employee diversity, hiring more faculty of color and faculty born outside the United States.

High Impact Teaching & Faculty Professional Development

- * Ongoing collaboration between the Upper School and Middle School faculty to sustain a scaffolded curriculum and continuum of learning from middle school to high school, enriching the experience of Austin Prep “lifers.”
- * Continue to invest in faculty professional development to promote the best practices in teaching and learning, including Austin Prep’s Faculty Summer Sabbatical Program. During summer 2021, Austin Prep funded a teacher’s sabbatical to conduct research at Yellowstone National Park. [Click here](#) to read more in the November 6, 2021 Cougar Courier.
- * Continued training on [diversity and inclusion](#) with experts such as [Dr. Crystal Kuykendall](#).
- * Professional development opportunities on the horizon this year include:
 - Faculty traveling to Berlin through Salem State University’s Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies to develop a [history elective on genocide](#).
 - Training from a noted educational authority on continuous learning, feedback, growth mindset, metacognition, and innovation.
- * Created a teacher coaching program led by master-teacher Roger Stone who taught at Austin Prep for 52 years before he transitioned to mentoring the next generation of master-teachers at Austin Prep. In addition to newer faculty receiving personalized instructional coaching, Roger conducts monthly teaching workshops open to all faculty.
- * Faculty continue to align teaching and learning with the practice of purposeful inquiry – moving beyond the acquisition of facts to higher levels of analysis, deepening curiosity, problem solving, and the synthesis of information.
- * Faculty conduct workshops on best-in-class instructional practices with organizations like New England Association of Schools and Colleges, the Salem State Collaborative Project, and the Sophia Institute for Teachers. They also have appeared as guests on educational podcasts like “The Teacher As” and wrote book reviews on Middle School educational literature.
- * The Middle School Robotics class is building prosthetic arms. The class is learning how to use Austin Prep’s 3D printers to replicate parts through CAD drawings and then assembling and testing the arms in class. The finished products will be donated to the e-NABLE network to impact the life of someone in need.
- * Austin Prep maintains membership in the following professional organizations to stay aligned with current trends and best practices in education:
 - Augustinian Secondary Education Association (ASEA)
 - National Catholic Education Association (NCEA)
 - New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)
 - National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS)
 - Association of Independent Schools of New England (AISNE)
 - Classical Association of New England (CANE)

Advisory & Student Social-Emotional Health & Wellbeing

- * Advisory groups function like families where students share wisdom, experience, and perspective. Central to this family concept is the teacher, who encourages mission-aligned dialogue. The students' Advisor is their principal advocate and mentor, supporting them as they navigate the social, emotional, and academic milestones of middle and high school.
- * Increased focus of Advisors to identify students who might benefit from additional support.
- * Through a collaboration of the Admissions and Health & Wellness departments, we launched the Cubby Cares Mentoring Program staffed by Upper School student leaders.
- * Augmented programming through campus speakers and advisory conversations to counteract bullying, cyberbullying, bias, racism, and depression and to promote responsible choices and healthy living.

Enriching Curricular & Co-Curricular Experiences

- * Keeping average class size to 16 sustains a strong learning community among students and teachers, fostering cooperation, collaboration, and rapport.
- * To elevate the experience of students who participate in the arts at Austin Prep, the Art & Design Department moved co-curricular arts programming to the [Greater Boston Stage Company Theater](#) in Stoneham. Productions such as Austin Prep's annual rendition of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* and *Lessons and Carols* will be held in a professional theater to showcase the talents of our musicians, vocalists, dancers, and stage crew.
- * The Math Department is currently designing a mini-course on financial literacy for ninth grade students.
- * Sixth-grade students in Earth and Space Science are learning about monitoring the health of a river ecosystem by collecting monthly data on the Aberjona River that flows through campus.
- * Our partnership with the Independent Schools Cultural Alliance (ISCA) offers Middle School students the opportunity to study in the United Kingdom during the summer and experience a broader world.
- * As the pandemic continues to recede, we are refocusing our attention on student trips (such as the recent Class of 2022 trip to Disney), both domestic and abroad, that will immerse our students in capstone experiences, service, and greater cultural awareness.
- * Middle School students participated this November in National Novel Writing Month in partnership with [NaNoWriMo](#). Middle School students were challenged to complete a 10,000-word novel in 30 days.
- * Hired an additional college counselor to increase personalized attention for students in their college discernment process, reducing the senior-college advisor ratio to approximately 28 to 1.
- * Over the last several years, Austin Prep graduates have matriculated in a cohort of Ivy League and other selective colleges and universities. Here is a select list.

Select Colleges and Universities Enrolling Austin Prep Graduates

American University
Arizona State University
Auburn University
Baylor College
Boston College
Boston University
Bowdoin College
Brown University
Citadel Military College of South Carolina
Clemson University
Colby College
Colgate University
College of the Holy Cross
Creighton University
Dartmouth College
Duke University
Elon University
Emerson College
Endicott College
Fairfield University
Fordham University
George Washington University
Georgetown University
Georgia Institute of Technology
Harvard University
High Point University
Hobart & Smith Colleges
James Madison University
Loyola University Maryland
Marquette University
Massachusetts Maritime Academy
Middlebury College
New York University
Northeastern University
Northwestern University
Ohio State University
Pennsylvania State University
Pennsylvania State University
Pepperdine University
Princeton University
Providence College
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rutgers University
Sarah Lawrence College
Skidmore College
Stevens Institute of Technology
Stonehill College
Trinity College – Dublin
Tufts University
University of Arizona
University of California-Berkeley
University of Limerick
University of Manchester
University of Massachusetts-Amherst
University of Notre Dame
University of Pennsylvania
University of Southern California
University of St. Andrews
University of Virginia
University of Wisconsin-Madison
United States Naval Academy
Vassar College
Villanova University
Wake Forest University
Wellesley College
Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Xavier University



UPGRADES & MODERNIZATION: TECHNOLOGY & INFRASTRUCTURE

In the prior 2020-2021 academic year, Austin Prep invested approximately \$1.4 million in capital upgrades and operational costs to safely open the School amid the backdrop of the global pandemic. The School invested heavily in health and safety equipment – thermal scanners, retrofitting HVAC systems with disinfecting equipment, nearly 100 portable air purifiers, and personal protection equipment.

A significant portion of that \$1.4 million investment was in technology upgrades to facilitate teaching and learning in virtual and hybrid environments – remote platforms, interactive smart boards, audio-visual equipment for every classroom, staff training, and hardware to support increased Wi-Fi capability and internet access. At the start of the 2020-2021 academic year, all Middle School students were issued new iPads. At the start of this academic year, all Upper School students were issued a MacBook, a technological tool better suited for the teaching and learning environment of high school.

During summer 2021, Austin Prep completed the first step of installing new external infrastructure and electrical substructures. Replacing generators and transformers, installing new curbing, and paving the driveway is not as exciting as opening the new dining hall in 2018 or cutting the ribbon on the lower field complex in 2020. It was, however, an essential step forward in advancing key aspects of the School's campus plan.

Critical to our continued growth, the past summer's construction project is part of a larger initiative to advance Austin Prep's Strategic Plan and upgrade other aging or tired infrastructure. The softball field, a capital project priority, is due for an upgrade to align its quality with both the upper and lower athletic complexes. Those facilities have lighting, something we would not be able to install for the softball field without first modernizing our electrical grid. Similarly, as we look to become greener and reduce the School's carbon footprint with energy efficient rooftop HVAC units, we need the right electrical substructure to eventually make that a reality.

We continue to think about the future and look to our recent past for inspiration. Over the last 8 years, there have been significant upgrades and renovations to campus facilities, all aligned with our strategic planning. The more noteworthy projects include transformations of the upper stadium, the dining hall, the main foyer, instructional and administrative space, our technology network backbone, and most recently, the tennis courts and multi-purpose fields of the lower athletic complex.

In addition to the softball field, emerging priorities in the next few years include facelifts for the science labs, installing energy efficient and environmentally friendly HVAC systems and windows, and the continued renovation of instructional spaces. Over the last three years, we have refreshed about a dozen classrooms with new lighting, flooring, and ceilings. To give context, the cost to refresh a single classroom, on average, is about \$30,000. We have approximately 60 classrooms remaining – or about \$1.8 million.

PHILANTHROPY, ANNUAL GIVING, & IGNITING HEARTS

During the 2020-2021 academic year, philanthropic giving to Austin Prep reached new heights as we raised more money than ever before. Austin Prep's accelerating trajectory of growth and success would not be possible without such philanthropic support from the community. Tuition sustains the status quo and could never support the transformation the School has experienced since 2013. Philanthropic dollars create new opportunities in the form of new initiatives, new programs, and new infrastructure.

When the global pandemic was declared in March 2020, Austin Prep's Igniting Hearts Capital Campaign was making tremendous progress on Phase II which began in 2019. To support what operating budgets cannot, the Board of Trustees approved Phase II to fund the construction of several infrastructure projects referenced above. Phase II is a continuation of a campaign that began in 2014 with the upgrade to Fr. Seymour Field and Connolly Track.

Unfortunately, the global pandemic derailed campaign and construction momentum just as the lower athletic complex was being completed. As the pandemic recedes, we are refocusing, recalibrating, and reprioritizing our attention on campaign activities and construction planning so that we can bring to completion this phase of Austin Prep's strategic goals – the renovation of the softball field and the addition of more campus parking.

Because of our extraordinary success over the last 8 years, there are many opportunities to build upon the sturdy foundation we have set. The faith, confidence, and trust among the Austin Prep community provides the inspiration to advance the strategic vision and expand even further our philanthropic endeavors. As of this writing we have a little over \$2 million committed towards our campaign goal of \$3 million. Philanthropic support will be critical in sustaining our momentum and advancing our vision.

INVESTMENT IN FACULTY

You may have heard the story of the CEO and CFO who had a slightly different perspective about the importance of investing in people. The CFO said to the CEO “that’s an awful lot of money to spend on professional development. What if we spend the money and they leave?” The CEO responded, “what if we don’t spend the money and they stay?”

Resourceful and resilient, the faculty have been a driving force during the pandemic and in advancing Austin Prep's Strategic Plan. Austin Prep continues to expand resources to ensure the faculty have what they need to stay at the forefront of the teaching profession and their respective disciplines. Investment in strong professional growth for the faculty is one of the ways we attract and retain the very best. For the foreseeable future, that trend will continue as we do all we can to fortify our professional learning community and reward teaching excellence.

Enrollment at Austin Prep has never been higher. That didn't happen by chance; it is the result of a community working together in common purpose. During challenging times, spirited organizations demonstrate resolve through strong leadership, consistent and open communication, courage and integrity, quick responsiveness to evolving needs, innovative problem solving, and an unshakable commitment to mission. Austin Prep is a spirited organization. We have always believed we are stronger together. Unitas sets the standard.

The central aspect of strategic planning is to assist our students in reaching their full potential through the mission-promise of Austin Prep. The accelerating growth of Austin Prep over the last several years through community-based strategic planning has united preparation with opportunity, generating transformative educational opportunities.

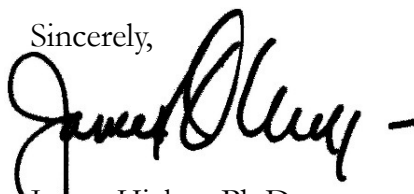
Despite the seemingly unending pandemic challenges that we all have faced for nearly two years, Austin Prep hasn't faltered. We continue to focus on what matters most – living our mission. We make sure that veritas, unitas, and caritas remain the central keystones of the Austin Prep family. Austin Prep, even in a public health crisis, remains steadfast and vibrant. Our steadiness regenerates, paradoxically, because we adapt as needed on our Journey so that we can cogently shape in every Austin Prep student an Augustinian heart.

You've probably heard me say that what matters most is the unwritten curriculum, which I define as what remains after students forget all the history, formulas, and facts they were taught. The unwritten curriculum at Austin Prep is about the relationships students form, the lasting memories they create, the experiences they will carry with them for a lifetime, and the sterling character they develop.

Most importantly, the unwritten curriculum teaches students to navigate the complex Journey of a restless heart by listening to the voice of who St. Augustine identified as the Inner Teacher. We were made by God, for God, and we're on our way back to God. A robust dialogue with the Inner Teacher keeps us moving in the right direction.

Our future is bright, and we are well-positioned for continued success. Our community travels on an unwavering Journey of renewal and excellence. With faith in our heritage, with confidence in our future, with your energetic support, with the intercession of St. Augustine, and with God's grace, Austin Prep will continue on an enduring and transformational Journey of the heart.

I know there's a lot in this communication and I welcome your thoughts, insights, and feedback if you get a moment. Perspective from members of the Austin Prep family is important to me. I'm happy to speak in person or simply open an email that you can send to jhickey@austinprep.org.

Sincerely,

James Hickey, Ph.D.
Head of School