



GSA: A Vision for Our Future

GSA is a very good school, providing a very good education for our students. But a good school shouldn't settle for being good. It should aim to be an even better school for years to come, improving what we do today and planning now for future improvements.

Planning starts with vision. What follows is a comprehensive vision of how GSA might more fully achieve its mission. It is a vision that touches every aspect of the Academy. *Getting there* will be a work in progress. This paper is a first step, to be followed by thoughtful, strategic planning, and along the way there will undoubtedly be revisions and refinements as we explore the vision and work to make it a reality.

In 2019, GSA's Board of Trustees approved a mission statement which reads, in part:

GSA provides a comprehensive and challenging education for all students, for those who will build futures in surrounding communities and for those who will make lives elsewhere in the world. Our many academic and experiential programs foster a love of knowledge, inspire creativity, instill self-confidence, encourage good character, and prepare each graduate for a purposeful life in a changing world.

At the same time, the Board adopted six "vision statements," setting out bold goals for the future. Each of these statements (in boxes) will introduce elements of this comprehensive vision.

GSA Vision Statement I: *We will be a vibrant learning community that proudly reflects the diversity of students from our surrounding towns, as well as those from elsewhere in the world, enabling them to thrive now and in the future.*

Local Admissions

Enrolling a significant majority of the high school students from our seven "tuitioning" towns is essential to achieving our mission and sustaining financial well-being.

- We will improve our local admissions efforts and initiatives so that we reliably enroll 90% of rising ninth graders each year, and have at least an average of 85% of the total peninsula high school students at GSA year-over-year.

Boarding Program

GSA's boarding program is an important part of what we do and who we are. The mix of local students with students from other parts of Maine and around the world adds perspectives and experiences to the campus that benefit all students.

- The boarding program will be financially self-sufficient, paying all its own costs and generating additional revenue that will be used to benefit all GSA students.
- We will develop initiatives and opportunities within the Boarding Program that intentionally connect our boarding students with members of the greater peninsula community.

GSA Vision Statement II: *We will provide all GSA students with an education that helps them pursue whatever jobs and career paths they choose, so that when they succeed, they and their communities will be the better for it.*

Academic Program

Our academic program will be even more deliberately distinctive, coherent, and holistic for every type of learner, for every level of ability, and designed to support every aspiration.

- We will use established, respected educational research to guide our thinking on curricula, pedagogy, and assessment in order to have a full and coherent academic program.
- We will develop new courses and learning opportunities that focus on and take advantage of our location on the coast of Maine.
- Every academic department and program will create signature, distinctive, and engaging location-based courses.
- We will improve our intern and mentorship programs (Independent Study) to better connect our students with local people and businesses, and provide more opportunities for extended study/work outside our curriculum and campus.
- We will explore ways to provide *all* students with independent learning opportunities, not just juniors and seniors.
- We will increase experiential course opportunities for all students.
- For students who do not thrive in more traditional classes, we will find or create alternative programs to serve them.

Academic support

- We will enhance and expand our special education programming to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of students who could benefit from such programming.
- We will incorporate our special education program into regular classrooms to the fullest extent possible.
- We will create a more inclusive Learning Center to provide academic support for *all* students, in the belief that all students have “learning needs.”

Other programming

- We will grow our arts programs, and better integrate them with each other, so that music, drama, dance and the fine arts intentionally intersect.
- We will add music technology, and audio and video recording in an on-campus studio to our offerings.
- We will enhance our technology and trades offerings, whether computer-related, or through our wood, metal and engine shops. Some of this will take place in a digital fabrication space.

GSA Vision Statement III: *We recognize that a GSA education is not just a matter of cultivating intellectual and creative strengths but also requires caring for students' physical and emotional needs. Everything we do will be stamped with this conviction.*

Student Life Programs

Student life programming covers all aspects of a student's experience that is not academic. But successful student life programming, by supporting students' physical and emotional health, is the foundation of academic success.

- Advising: We will continue to develop and strengthen our advising program to include adolescent development, general health and wellness, character education, and practical life skills programming.
- Equity, Inclusion and Community: Our Statement of Community commits us to provide a "safe, equitable environment, free from discrimination, harassment, and bullying." We will find more ways to fulfill this commitment in every aspect of our school.
- Athletic Program: Our athletic program will serve a broad range of interests and levels of ability, with a focus on being competitive at the varsity level, on participation and skill development at the sub-varsity level, and developing character on every level.
- Mental Health and Wellness: We will increase support of good mental and emotional health for students and adults.
- Food For Thought program: We will continue to raise funds for this program and thus expand it, enabling students to bring food home, and feeding families during the summer.

Student leadership

- We will provide even more meaningful and substantive opportunities for students to be involved in their school, through clubs, student council, school newspapers, and other student-initiated and student-led organizations.
- We will increase student involvement in institutional planning and decision-making.

Student Conduct

How a school deals with student conduct issues has a significant impact on its success with students in all areas, not just those connected to behavior. The best systems view student conduct as another means of educating students, and a way of giving them the skills they need to thrive as adults; "discipline" should not be understood merely as controlling bad behavior.

- We will continue to build a "restorative justice" component into our disciplinary system in keeping with best practices and the Maine Department of Education mandates.

GSA Vision Statement IV: *We will be seen as a community resource, in the belief that schools and their communities make each other stronger. We will expand school-community partnerships and real-world learning opportunities that engage students and community members in shared activities and projects for the benefit of both.*

GSA will be a model of how a school works with its community to the benefit of both.

- Students will collaborate with community members who serve as role models, guides, mentors—and possibly future employers.

- We will find more ways to invite members of the community into classes and programs to interact with students and share wisdom and experience.
- We will offer our campus as a resource to local people and groups.

GSA Vision statement V: *We will have a safe, attractive, functional, and cost-efficient facility that supports our current programing well and has the flexibility to adapt to changing needs in the future.*

Physical Plant

- Our campus facilities must be well-constructed, purposeful, welcoming, and safe.
- Our facilities will enable us to meet our highest educational ambitions and aspirations.
- Our facilities will be inspiring, innovative, and environmentally responsible.
- We will resolve the most urgent facilities issues in the next 2 years, and create a plan for the complete transformation of our campus over the next 5 to 20 years

GSA Vision Statement VI: *We will be financially sustainable, with the resources we need to maintain GSA's facilities and provide for every GSA student's needs. We will grow our endowment, meet more ambitious annual GSA Fund goals, and benefit from the support of sending towns that recognize the indispensable value of a strong high school in their community.*

Relationship with our towns and supplemental tuition

The bulk of our revenue will always come from the state-set tuitions and any supplemental tuitions that our towns pay. Recognizing this, and grateful for it, GSA will be a model of town academy-community relations, both in the ways we communicate about our programs and finances and in how we collaborate with our towns.

- We will seek to minimize the need for supplemental tuition by increasing the revenue we generate ourselves through fundraising and other revenue streams, with a particular focus on potential summer use of GSA facilities.

Advancement and Fundraising

Successful advancement is the key to all our aspirations to be a remarkable school, and we will be a model for small school advancement and fundraising efforts. This will happen through a review of our already successful fundraising efforts, and through comprehensive and effective communications plans that draw in all our constituents and capture new ones.

- Our GSA Fund will provide 6% of our operating budget (currently providing 4.7%).
- Our capital fundraising will enable us to do the facility work we need with a minimum of borrowing.
- Each year we will identify a number of special needs and projects, and do targeted fundraising to support and complete them.
- We will increase our number of major donors, successfully securing even more major gifts and long-term commitments of support, such as planned giving.

This vision statement was put together by Head of School Tim Seeley at the request of the Board of trustees, and has been endorsed in principle by the Board. In the coming months, GSA faculty and staff will take these general, high level ideas, explore their feasibility, and come up with plans and timetables for their implementation, pending Board approval.