

From the Head of School

GARHETT WAGERS



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Head of School



"The mission speaks to why we are here—to celebrate the uniqueness of children; to steward their intellectual curiosity, faith, and passion for discovery; and to cultivate joy, playfulness, and growth in a child-centered environment."

One of the things I love about the life cycle of a school is that there is a distinct beginning and end to each year. We get to set goals at the beginning of the year, work toward those goals, and pause to measure how well we did and are doing as we approach the end of the year. In school, we believe learning and growing often includes making mistakes as we stretch ourselves. The end of each year gives us a chance to step back and ask ourselves, "Did we do what we planned to do?" Based on the answer, we also can answer the question, "Now what?"

Of course this is true for our students, who finish a grade level, take a break, and come back ready to build on learning or start a new approach to learning, depending upon the prior year. Our teachers are no exception as they review lessons and curriculum resources to see if changes should be made.

As an organization, we have a practice at St. Mark's of pausing each June to reflect on our work. Our Summer Council meets for two days, shortly after school ends, and dives deeply into the ins and outs of the year to assess what can be done to make us better in the year to follow. This reflection is not random or general; it is very specific and made through the lenses of our Mission, our Characteristics of Professional Excellence, and our Strategic Plan.

This work begins with a survey of our faculty and staff in the spring, when we ask them to rate our success at living our mission, practicing the excellence we aspire to achieve, and accomplishing the strategic priorities set for that year. The survey also provides for narrative responses aimed at helping us gather stakeholder perspectives on what should be next in terms of strategic priorities.

From this we form a Summer Council team from senior leadership, staff, and faculty. The first day of the Council's gathering pulls apart the raw survey feedback to help us gather an impression of what worked, what didn't, and how this informs which priorities we should focus on in the year ahead. On day two, the Council discusses and aligns around a short list of successes to celebrate and opportunities to grow. They are framed around each of the four goals in our Strategic Plan. From this, recommendations for our focus in the next school year are made.

Later in the summer, another team will take those recommendations and refine them for clarity and focus. These focused strategic initiatives are shared with our full faculty and staff at our opening gathering in August, and will inform goal setting for everyone in the year ahead.

This process is intentional, aimed at allowing us to all be in the same boat, rowing together in the same direction. This helps us stay focused on what we believe matters most in serving the children of St. Mark's throughout their journey here, and ensures we will prepare them for the path ahead, as they launch to high school and beyond.

We feel that mission speaks to why we are here—to celebrate the uniqueness of children; to steward their intellectual curiosity, faith, and passion for discovery; and to cultivate joy, playfulness, and growth in a child-centered environment.

Our Strategic Plan speaks to what we do, and each year we refocus the lens of this plan based on what has been accomplished, using the plan to guide our next priorities. Later in this publication, we provide an update on where we are in the plan, based on the work from the 2023-24 school year. We are proud of our progress and excited for what comes next. Our school is in fantastic shape and ready for more!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Garhett Wagers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names clearly legible.

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