

# NJAIS

New Jersey Association of Independent Schools

## Report of the Visiting Accreditation Team

Rutgers Preparatory School



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Submitted by:

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## **OVERVIEW OF THE NJAIS ACCREDITATION PROCESS**

Accreditation is central to the mission of NJAIS. NJAIS has been accrediting member schools since 1995, either as the sole accrediting agency, or cooperatively with the American Montessori Society (AMS), the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA), or the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA-CESS).

Similar to its member schools, NJAIS itself participates in a rigorous and impartial review of its accreditation program and demonstrates adherence to the Criteria for Effective Independent School Accreditation Practices set forth by the International Council Advancing Independent School Accreditation (ICAISA, formerly known as the NAIS Commission on Accreditation). In the fall of 2001, following the creation and adoption of its Standards and Self-Study by the Association's Board of Trustees, the NJAIS accreditation program was granted recognition by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). In 2013, NJAIS was granted certification by an international review panel from the NAIS Commission on Accreditation. In 2022-2023, NJAIS is undergoing its own accreditation review, accrediting the accreditor.

The thorough and rigorous process of accreditation administered by NJAIS is important to independent schools for several reasons:

- Undergoing a thorough self-study process, receiving feedback through peer review, and developing a multi-year plan for institutional improvement supports each school in more fully realizing its mission.
- An effective process of evaluation and accreditation brings credibility to NJAIS and inspires public confidence in each of its member schools.
- The absence of an effective and professional system of peer review could well result in increased over-involvement on the part of state and/or federal governmental agencies, a step that would likely be more cumbersome and less responsive to the unique character of independent schools.

Other benefits of NJAIS accreditation include:

- Promoting a reflective and collaborative continuous school improvement process;
- Providing school leaders, including Boards of Trustees, with independent, non-governmental validation of current programs and services, along with well considered recommendations for future improvements;

- Granting seasoned professional educators valuable exposure to best practices in other schools through their participation on peer review Visiting Teams;
- Presenting a school's Board of Trustees an independent, non-governmental validation that the school under its care is effectively delivering a quality educational experience to its students;
- Assuring current school parents and the broader public - including prospective families - that the school is focused on providing a safe and enriching educational learning environment while maintaining efficient and effective operations;
- Providing a credential that is often required in corporate and foundation fundraising;
- Facilitating school and college admissions, transfers, and admission of international students;
- Positioning school leaders for strategic planning and visioning;
- Enhancing staff collegiality and broader school understanding through the self-study process; and
- Providing a credential required by SEVIS/SEVP for issuing 1-20 forms.

Every 10 years, following defined procedures, a school undertakes a comprehensive self-evaluation that results in a Self-Study Report. This is the foundation of the accreditation process and provides the focus for the subsequent visit of a team of seasoned educators. This NJAIS Guide for Accreditation integrates mandated standards into a self-study protocol that allows a school to both describe how the NJAIS Standards for Accreditation are met and to generate plans for school improvement. The NJAIS Standards for Accreditation are organized under the following major sections and sub-sections:

- I. Mission/Philosophy
- II. Institutional Leadership
- III. Educational Program
- IV. Technology
- V. Advancement
- VI. Finance and Operations

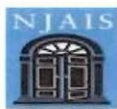
VII. Residential Schools/Homestay Programs (if applicable)

VIII. Schools Affiliated with Religious Organizations/Faith-Based Schools (if applicable)

A Visiting Team, comprised of peers from other independent schools, visits the school, views it through the lens of its mission statement and the NJAIS Standards for Accreditation, and validates the school's Self-Study Report. Following this visit, the Visiting Team provides the school and the NJAIS Accreditation Committee with a draft report that includes the team's observations, commendations, and recommendations. This committee, comprised of individuals mainly from NJAIS member schools, is responsible for shepherding the NJAIS accreditation process. It reads all reports and makes recommendations to the NJAIS Board of Trustees regarding accreditation status, and the Board votes on accreditation. Committee members recuse themselves when their own school or a competing school is under discussion.

Between one to three months after the Decennial Visit, the school receives from NJAIS a final comprehensive Decennial Report and learns of its accreditation status. This Decennial Report lays the foundation for future school improvement and strategic planning/ thinking/ visioning.

The NJAIS Self-Study Guide for Accreditation and NJAIS Standards for Accreditation that were approved by the NJAIS Board of Trustees in 2021 were used by Rutgers Preparatory School to prepare their Self-Study.



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## INTRODUCTION and HISTORY

*Through excellence in education, we inspire students to discover and pursue their passions, embrace intellectual curiosity and creativity, and lead with confidence.*

The 256 year history of Rutgers Preparatory School (RPS) is a remarkable story of constancy, adaptation, relevance of purpose, and faithfulness to mission. Since 1964, all three divisions of the school have been located on a 40-acre site on the banks of the Delaware and Raritan Canal in Somerset, New Jersey.

Now a pre-K-12 coeducational day school of 697 students enrolled in the current year, RPS began as a boys boarding school in service to what was Queen's College and later Rutgers College. While female students attended RPS in the first quarter of the 20th century, a full and enduring commitment to coeducation commenced in 1952.

Development of the campus has been ongoing, particularly over the past 40 years, and has been prompted both by planning and events: a 1982 master plan, a fire in 1983 that damaged or destroyed much of the Upper School facilities, a 1996 plan that addressed the major recommendations of the school's most recent Middle States evaluation, a revised 2002 site plan that led to significant changes in campus design, and infrastructure improvements that enhanced the school's capacity for future projects. During Head of School Steve Loy's 30-year tenure at RPS the following major facilities projects have been completed:

1997 - Building Tomorrow Campaign provides a second Gymnasium in the O'Connell Athletic Center; Silverman Library/Technology Center; The Barn; and a renovated Lower School.

2001 - Music Building opens.

2003 - Heinlein Wing in the Middle School is constructed on the footprint of the original high school wing that was lost in the fire.

2005 - Turf Field is constructed on Delapietro Field as one of the first artificial surfaces in the region.

2009 - Campus Grounds Renovations are completed that provide increased parking, improved traffic flow, and new tennis courts.

2011 - Dining Commons is opened.

2012 - Learning Commons with 10 additional classrooms is opened.

(RPS Website, History of RPS)

The quiet phase of a \$10 million campaign is now underway to construct an Assembly Hall with multi-purpose capabilities as well as demonstration classrooms and a new Admissions Office suite.

RPS fully celebrates the racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity within its student population. The school's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging is evident in curriculum, the advisory program, faculty and staff professional development, the inclusion of

international students in its community, and the extent of financial aid used to make an RPS education accessible to approximately 46% of its students. Increasing the capacity for each colleague and student to thrive in a diverse community is a clear focus of school leaders within the student body, the faculty, and the administration as evidenced by structures such as the Advocates for Inclusion in Diversity and ongoing work with *Six Seconds*, an organization devoted to developing and broadening individual and community emotional intelligence.

As is the case with most independent day schools, RPS is tuition driven with a modest portion of the operating budget being met through endowment income, annual giving, and auxiliary operations. The school is debt free with healthy reserves. Enrollment has grown steadily over the past five years, now including approximately 43 international students, 29 of whom are in residence with host families through a program called *Student Room Stay*. New resources and programming made possible by gifts and external financial support include the D'Aloia Center for Teaching and Learning, (which coordinates supplemental learning support and accommodations for students who qualify for and require individualized instructional practices, and does so without charging any additional fees to families), and the Bloomberg Financial Lab (launched with a grant from the E.E. Ford Foundation), which provides students access to and the ability to analyze financial markets, model economic scenarios, and interpret key news and developments that are affecting the global economy.

In terms of community, the impacts of COVID include assistance in attracting and retaining students and families who might otherwise have remained in local school systems and are now choosing to remain at RPS even as operational responses to COVID have eased in most schools. Certain RPS traditions and practices had been suspended during the pandemic and some degree of the recent enrollment growth and associated on-boarding of new students has unfolded without the benefit of these unifying experiences. Moving forward, the school seeks to revive and cultivate deeper ownership and care for the RPS culture of kindness, caring, and respect. The school's work with *Six Seconds* on emotional intelligence is evidence of that commitment.

## **DEMOGRAPHICS - Rutgers Preparatory School -- 2022/2023**

**Date Founded:** 1766

**School Type:** Coeducational, Independent, Day School

**Grades:** Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12

**Number of Students Enrolled:** 697 (Upper School: 422 / Middle School: 117 / Lower School: 157)

**Girls:** 323

**Boys:** 372

**Nonbinary:** 1

### **Number of Sections per grade:**

**Grades PreK- 4:** 1 section per grade level

**Grade 5. 2 Sections**

**Grades 6 - 8:** 3 sections per grade level

**Grades 9 - 12:** Admitted as an incoming grade-level class

### **Number of Faculty/Staff:**

**Teachers:** 78 Full-Time, 5 Part-Time

**Assistants/Interns:** 8 Full-Time, 2 Part-Time

**Administrators:** 34 Full-Time, 1 Part-Time

**Staff:** 18 Full-Time, 2 Part-Time

**Maintenance/Operations:** 15 Full-Time, 1 Part-Time

**Security:** 1 Full-Time, 0 Part-Time

**Student/Faculty Ratio:** Approximately 8.4:1

### **Facilities:**

**Classrooms (by division):** Upper School: 36      Middle School: 13 Lower School: 8

**Science Labs:** 8

**Technology Labs/Mobile iPad Carts:** 5

**Classroom Smart Boards:** Several but all classrooms also have Apple TV for screen mirroring

**Art Studios:** 5

**Music Rooms:** 4

**Gymnasiums:** 2

**Dining Halls:** 1

**Outdoor Play Areas/Fields/Tennis Courts:** 2 Play Areas, 3 soccer/lacrosse fields, 1 baseball field, 1 softball field, 5 tennis courts, 1 croquet pitch

**Library:** 1

## **I. MISSION/PHILOSOPHY**

### **A. Mission/Philosophy**

*Through excellence in education, we inspire students to discover and pursue their passions, embrace intellectual curiosity and creativity, and lead with confidence. - adopted 2012*

The 22-word RPS Mission Statement is put to work throughout the school. Student centered and action oriented, Head of School Steve Loy asserts that, "It creates a marketplace of ideas," when considered in relation to any aspect of school life.

The mission greets students, faculty, parents, and visitors on the exterior of the building upon arrival. It is also evident in programmatic intention and in the curriculum as demonstrated by the self-study and classroom visits. The Visiting Team observed that the Mission Statement is seldom displayed in its entirety around the campus. It is shared in bursts, a word or phrase highlighted on its own:

"inspire" and "intellectual curiosity" are hanging on classroom walls and in hallways.

These values are fostered and celebrated throughout the school. Individual teachers and departments embrace the mission and it is expressed in department curriculum articulation and student projects. RPS students cannot necessarily recite the Mission Statement, but evidence of the mission is revealed when they reflect on the community, describe what it has done for them, and what they hope to contribute.

Like the Mission Statement, RPS is student centered to a remarkable and admirable degree, and from the language and values of the Mission Statement flow other concepts central to school culture such as kindness, caring, and respect.

#### **The school is commended for:**

- Living the RPS mission in thoughts, words, and actions.
- Safeguarding and promoting the social and emotional well-being of students as a central responsibility of every adult in the community.
- Providing professional development to grow the capacity of RPS colleagues to support and engage with their students.

#### **The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Explicitly celebrate the Mission Statement by posting it in classrooms and public spaces for the benefit of community members and visitors.

## **B. School Climate and Culture**

In every encounter with our team members, as well as observed encounters between others, all members of the community were exceedingly polite, respectful, engaging, and caring. At every turn, students and staff went out of their way to engage with us and offer support.

Students of all ages approached us in the dining hall and on the pathways to offer directions or friendly commentary. There is a bright, positive energy among all members of the community on display in classrooms and activities. A shared pride exists among all members of the Rutgers Prep School community as it relates to school climate and culture. To a person, students, faculty, staff, and parents led with "diversity" when attributing characteristics of their positive school culture. Students describe RPS as a place where all individuals are known and respected. They describe a social fluidity that makes unlikely friends and creates a family-like atmosphere. The classroom environment is attentive, respectful, and engaged.

Students at RPS report being actively supported by each and every teacher; that faculty routinely look for ways to encourage their students both inside and outside the classroom, even going so far as to research and suggest extracurricular programs that will help students grow in their areas of passion and interest. They see very clearly the benefits of advisory, faculty who coach, and student clubs as a platform for the close relationships they value.

Student-to-student culture is also very positive. Students describe a social fabric that is collaborative and DEIB-aware. While there may be external pressures, they feel as though their peers want them to succeed. The students speak with great pride about how the upperclassmen that have come before them have endowed RPS' culture and their responsibility to the same. They offer concrete examples of how it is being done on campus every day, from morning meeting to athletic teams.

Faculty and staff are more inclined to see the impacts of COVID on student culture at RPS than their students. They acknowledge that the necessary distance and interruptions created fewer opportunities for connection amongst existing community members and prevented the school from seamlessly onboarding the 507 (153 in 2020, 202 in 2021, 152 in 2022) new Argonauts who have joined the RPS community since the fall of 2020. They also believe that delayed social development related to COVID is still present.

The community has rallied around this challenge; faculty, parents, and student groups are reviving old traditions and creating new opportunities for connection and social emotional learning from outdoor picnics and Welcome Weekend to cultural celebrations like Diwali and the Black History Month Wax Museum. Faculty articulate clearly that they are learning how to meet this challenge creatively. They are very intentional now about how they communicate their expectations to students each fall in the form of "101 Things" advisory exercise. In the Lower School, it is part of

the curriculum to learn how to be an Argonaut. Across divisions they understand that "part of embracing expectations is understanding them and why they exist.

Students agree that school spirit waned during COVID and they are hopeful that Student Government efforts can help rebuild it. Given the focus of the current capital campaign, supporting their goals would likely be beneficial across the board.

The singular faction of campus life that showed signs of disconnection were professionals between divisions. The practicality of information sharing seems to be a challenge. Few were able to speak with confidence about their colleagues' programs and work or describe ways in which the division supported one another.

**The school is commended for:**

- The extraordinary warmth and active kindness that permeates life at Rutgers Prep and for cultivating an atmosphere that inspires and supports learning.
- Creating a successful social fabric with students from so many backgrounds and faiths, where diversity is embraced and celebrated.
- Responding intentionally and thoroughly to concerns around the social-emotional impacts of COVID from SEL programming through Six Seconds to bolstering activities that confer culture.
- Consistent adherence to cultural expectations from the school leaders when engaging with every constituent group. School leaders demonstrate care and concern for faculty and students and respect the parent community. The ethos of respect is felt throughout the school.
- Faculty retention is impressive and teacher tenure reflects job satisfaction and professional belonging. Further, the school administration is adroit at identifying teacher strengths and aligning their skills with institutional needs.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Include more of the mission's language in the daily life of the school. Few professionals, parents, and no student leaders were able to reference singular or multiple words from the Mission Statement, although they spoke with pride about the school's culture.
- Create mechanisms for teacher feedback to the school administration. Whereas school administrators enjoy warm and collegial working relationships with teachers, there was a reluctance in some conversations to speak freely about teacher needs and concerns. RPS strives to be a school where every voice matters.
- Identify where linkage between divisions can be created and reinforced. Some academic departments have an organic linkage to other divisions via a shared department head whereas other departments are more siloed. Identifying ways for inter-division communication and sharing will foster productivity and loyalty.

### **C. Community Relations**

Parents are delighted to be part of the RPS community. They value the school ethic and respect the educational and programmatic processes of the school. They highly regard the school's approach to character development and see the value in their tuition investment. The outreach and cultural touch points with the parents are working very well. Most importantly, RPS is creating positive and on-going, multi-generational relationships with the community. Admissions is supported by the positive and thoughtfully cultivated relationships with stakeholders: faculty, staff, students, and parents.

#### **The school is commended for:**

- RPS is doing an excellent job of cohering its community both in terms of respecting and celebrating the diversity of its constituents and onboarding new colleagues, students and families each year.
- Maintaining a respectful blended community despite (or as a result of) the many ethnic cultural differences among its constituents.
- Supporting communal needs by empowering students to engage in community service.

#### **The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Strengthen the security of its open campus.
- Post signage to politely remind uninvited guests that the school is private property.

### **D. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging**

The Self-Study Report describes Rutgers Preparatory School as a diverse independent school, and this is abundantly evident on campus. The messaging on the walls and in the conduct of community members creates an environment that is welcoming to people of all religions, races, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and gender identities. The spirit of inclusion is a lived core value at RPS.

The faculty members are clearly passionate teachers, which is evident in the creation of the AID (Advocates for Inclusion in Diversity) Committee, a primary DEIB support system in the school to research information about social justice and diversity. AID committee members receive no extra compensation for this work but are considered to be "official volunteers" who meet once a month. The mission of AID is centered on providing workshops and resources for faculty to explore, gain an understanding of, and help minimize implicit and explicit bias. Their mission "to harness the strengths that reside in our community's diversity - including race, gender, ability, ethnicity, religion, financial circumstance, geography, and sexual orientation - to inspire faculty and students to become advocates of social justice" has started a steady movement of faculty toward greater



interest and understanding of the need of continuous education and professional development in these areas.

The AID committee is in the process of drafting a comprehensive DEIB action plan. They have partnered with consultants from the SixSeconds organization to survey different constituencies at RPS and to have a partner in creating their plan and in creating professional development modules for faculty focusing on emotional intelligence. The next step will be to implement what they have learned from the EVS study into an action plan with the academic team, who began meeting in the 2022-23 school year to assess their program and explore further changes.

The AID Committee is chaired by three faculty members in different divisions and with different backgrounds, all with some DEIB training experience. In interviews the AID committee leaders state that this model has been helpful in maintaining momentum and dividing duties. One of the AID committee leaders was allowed to scale back some other duties in order to fully support DEIB planning initiatives. There is no plan to institutionalize the AID Committee or condense the leadership to a single full-time role. The administration does not consult with the AID Committee during the hiring process.

**The school is commended for:**

- Giving voice to the faculty who are passionate about pursuing DEIB initiatives.
- Providing the AID Committee with resources (primarily time) and access to leadership to conduct research and gradually roll out training and professional development to faculty in a measured and meaningful way.
- Making DEIB access and interest a core consideration in the hiring process, giving confidence to the current faculty that DEIB initiatives are a priority for administration.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Balance the positive volunteer ethos of the Committee with a standing leadership model that insures the continuity of the Committee and maintains the scope and clarity of its charge.
- Provide students a more structured platform for DEIB action and reporting in the school.
- In the quest to further broaden the ethnic and racial diversity of the faculty, consider the value to the applicant of including AID leadership in the hiring process or other such measures which help to signal the RPS commitment to this goal.

## **E. Global Awareness**

Generous capacity for global awareness at RPS is evident at the start of the day as students arrive on campus. The school's population draws from several diverse communities in its immediate geographic area and beyond, including 29 international students who are part of the institution's homestay program. The school takes a great deal of pride in this fact as one of the essential components of the community's global awareness competency.

The school does leverage its diverse population to promote global awareness in the community, which includes Lower School holiday celebrations, some curricular experiences, and international travel. Discussions with Upper School faculty made it clear that while there are programs, clubs, international trips, and other ways that the community engages in global awareness, the school lacks cohesion among the three divisions on this important part of its institutional identity.

While the school has appointed a Dean of International Students, it may be that the position is under-utilized in regard to defining and developing what global awareness can mean for each student. There is a need for clearer communication, centralized leadership, and more inclusion from a variety of constituents on how to best utilize this important resource in the service of promoting global awareness.

**The school is commended for:**

- An impressively diverse student body that holds great potential for going above and beyond the current state of global awareness in the community.
- Changes to the ninth and tenth grade humanities curriculum that reflect the wider cultural conversations in education and serve to provide RPS students with a more diverse and global perspective.
- The Lower School's willingness to provide opportunities for its students to explore and experience global themes that provide a foundation for the Middle and Upper Schools to expand upon.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Take a curricular inventory of how global competencies and perspectives are addressed in the classroom throughout the three divisions.
- In consideration of the global diversity of the student body and the ubiquitous nature of global awareness at RPS, consider forming a committee focused on the global nature of the student population with representation from administrators, faculty, and students to assess how the school could better utilize this strength, establish goals for the work of the school community, and evaluate the outcomes of its programming.
- Consider expanding the role of the Dean of International Students to include all significant school-wide programs that touch upon global awareness, (including student travel), to provide greater structure and ongoing communication to the community.
- Work on the "one-school" concept across the three divisions to realize greater cohesion among the three divisions on this important part of institutional identity.

## **F. Environmental Stewardship**

Rutgers Prep's approach to environmental stewardship is driven by students and teachers who are passionate about this topic.

The efforts towards sustainability are focused on food, minimizing waste, recycling, and making updates to programs and buildings. The construction of the LEEDS certified Commons and the locally sourced produce are examples of two initiatives; one completed and one ongoing. A proposed butterfly garden would be an attractive addition to the campus and would provide opportunities for learning spring, summer, and fall. A commitment to environmental stewardship is also evident in educational programs such as the environmental science classes that are offered, and other curricular expressions of this commitment.

The work of environmental stewardship at RPS arises voluntarily from individuals who are already educated about sustainability. There is not an organizing body, such as a department or committee, which oversees these efforts, nor is there a clear school-wide plan for such initiatives. For example, the impetus for the construction of the LEEDS building was the financial support of an individual Trustee. The investigation into the water quality in the canal is limited to the Environmental Science class. Water refilling stations are provided, but there is no policy in place to encourage students and faculty to use reusable bottles, and there is a reliance on disposable K- cups for coffee drinkers. One class undertook plantings of native plants along the towpath. These plantings could provide further educational opportunities for students of all ages who might learn about biodiversity, but it is not clear that was the intention. The school provides trash and recycling containers to make it easy for students to recycle as needed, and educates students to reduce, reuse, and recycle.

In this COVID recovery time, some of the initiatives towards environmental sustainability have fallen out of practice. The dining services used to post information about the locally sourced produce, but no longer does so. The hope of having Meatless Mondays has not been realized. RPS used to compost, but the need for containers for the lunch program during COVID made composting too expensive. Prior to COVID, dining room waste was separated into compost and garbage, 40% of the waste generated was composted. RPS no longer provides reusable K- cups, and the use of disposable K- cups is an area of concern, one that the environmental science class will address in the spring of 2023.

### **The school is commended for:**

- Locally sourcing produce by the food service.
- Securing and celebrating LEED certification for the Commons.
- Providing support for individual ideas for projects and curriculum that are examples of environmental stewardship.
- On-going facility upgrades including the migration to LED bulbs across the campus and the installation of centralized HVAC controls across buildings.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Resume its practice of composting food waste.
- Encourage the use of reusable water bottles by students and employees,
- Map the work in all parts of the school that support or contribute to environmental sustainability and bring those efforts into alignment..
- Consider seeking sustainability accreditation for any future construction projects, and develop sustainability criteria for future renovations and facilities upgrades.
- Investigate using reusable K-cups again.

## **II.INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSIDP**

### **A. Governance**

The Rutgers Preparatory School Board prides itself on adhering to governance best practices and is committed to appropriately supporting the Head of School's work running the day-to-day operations of the school. Through the Self-Study Report and in discussions, it is abundantly clear that the Board takes its fiduciary responsibility seriously, and there is a strong sense of loyalty and deep fondness for the institution.

The Board is intentionally moving through a Board leadership transition, with a Board president-in-waiting appointed to replace the current Board Chair whose six-year term ends at the conclusion of the 2022-23 academic year. The new Board Chair will have already served 10 years as a Trustee. Board meetings allow for strategic discussions that are often facilitated through faculty led workshops and presentations. The RPS Board of Trustees is actively wrestling with important topics, including balancing tuition revenue with tuition assistance, continuing to make strides with an already strong DEIB program, and thinking through campus enhancements and major philanthropic needs.

The Board is also leaning into the important work of planning for a future Head of School transition. Executive sessions have been spent considering different strategies to prepare the community for a transition as well as strategies to ensure the success of a future Head of School. They are being appropriately proactive and thoughtful, knowing that Steve Loy is oftentimes synonymous with the school itself.

Trustees speak with pride about the diversity of the Board and the different perspectives around the table, which includes current parents, former parents, alumni, and friends of the school. Trustees welcome unique viewpoints and know such contributions enhance their work. The Trustees embrace Board education and speak with respect and appreciation about the training they have undergone, whether about governance, DEIB, or school operations.

The Board continues to grapple with the desire to be as nimble as possible with regard to future strategic planning. While Board meetings are strategic and Trustees are engaged with strategic thinking through priorities and major decisions, the Board is hesitant to commit to a set, static plan out of concern that it would be quickly outdated and affect their ability to respond to new priorities. Instead, the Trustees take the time to make yearly updates to strategic initiatives, with new tactics introduced each year based on evolving needs and circumstances. The Board's approach is innovative and should be shared more widely so that the larger community can be informed and rally around the school's nimble strategy.

Board members complete a yearly Board evaluation and Head of School evaluation in addition to completing a conflict of interest statement. The Board does not currently conduct individual board member evaluations nor do they complete a confidentiality statement.

**The school is commended for:**

- An exceptional commitment to good governance practices and in the division of responsibility between the Head of School and the Board.
- Thoughtfully thinking through a future Head of School transition.
- Committing to a diverse board and ensuring strong, continuous Board leadership.
- Trusting in the school's administration and appreciation for the day-to-day work of the school's leaders.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Include a focus on celebrating all that has been accomplished during the current Head of School's tenure as a significant theme in transition planning.
- Consider the potential benefits of a more transparent yearly strategic plan update process to help ensure a shared vision for the school that goes beyond the Board level.
- Ensure that each Board member completes a yearly confidentiality statement as well as individual Board member evaluations.

**B. Administration**

Head of School, Steve Loy, has surrounded himself with a talented and dedicated team of school leaders. The members of the administrative team believe in the school's mission and are committed to their respective areas of responsibility while also understanding the essential role of the leadership team. The administrative team brings years of experience to the work, and it is commendable that multiple members of the team are home-grown talent and have risen through the RPS ranks to assume a leadership role. It is also worth commending the focus on faculty and staff development, not only via professional development opportunities, but also through the creation of multiple

leadership roles throughout the school that provide aspiring leaders with opportunities for growth. During his tenure, Dr. Loy has taken some important steps to help members of his leadership team have the bandwidth and needed infrastructure to think strategically and implement new initiatives while also ensuring each important departmental function is still met. For example, the Director of Enrollment Management, the Chief Operating Officer, the Advancement Director, and the Director of Athletic and Community Programs all oversee director level positions who help carry out day-to-day responsibilities, thus freeing senior leadership members for greater strategic work to enhance their departments effectiveness and reach.

The school's leadership continues to seek ways to support the various functions of RPS with a staunch commitment to do what is best for students and their experience. To that end, the school is considering ways to continue bolstering their student health and wellness efforts and should determine the feasibility of adding a new, administrative-level Director of Health and Wellness position to oversee the health department as well as the school counselors to ensure a cohesive approach to health and wellness. As the school continues to grow both in enrollment and in its fundraising efforts, further work is needed to delineate between the school's marketing efforts and their communications efforts. Additional clarity of roles and responsibilities will enhance each area's work as will a better understanding of what function falls under enrollment management and what falls under advancement.

After a difficult two-plus years navigating the pandemic and with an increasingly growing student body, faculty, and administration, the school sees the need to continue fine-tuning protocols and procedures to ensure consistency across the school. An effort to create updated standard operating procedures would ensure school-wide consistency with hiring and evaluation as well as help with communication best practices.

Many leadership positions are filled by aspiring and growing professionals, some who started in the school as young teachers and now have been promoted to fill roles with wider responsibilities. To continue the culture of cultivating young talent, the school should consider an annual leadership review of its staff to identify future leaders who can be developed and promoted.

Finally, the school understandably chose to scale back its faculty evaluation system during COVID. This decision made sense as the school acknowledged the toll the pandemic played on its community and did not want to add an additional layer of stress. Moving forward and with school operations back to a more normal cadence, the school should reinstitute its evaluation process across all school constituents to ensure ongoing feedback and growth.

**The school is commended for:**

- Creating overarching leadership positions in advancement, finance, athletics, and enrollment management that allow time and space for programmatic oversight, strategic thinking, and initiative implementation at senior-level positions.
- Cultivating internal talent and creating multiple pathways for faculty or staff members to move into leadership positions.
- Prioritizing and supporting faculty and staff professional development opportunities and for taking full advantage of local NJAIS events.
- Creating and nurturing a collegial, professional, and talented administrative team of leaders who believe in the school and its mission.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Continue to find opportunities or seek structures that allow senior-level administrators to have the capacity for strategic planning, initiative implementation, and higher level department area oversight as already established or underway in Advancement, Enrollment Management, Finance, and Athletics.
- With increasing demands across all schools for enhanced social and emotional support, consider creating a Health and Wellness department with an administrative level leadership position to oversee the health teachers, school counselors, and other relevant personnel.
- Determine how best to utilize and further distinguish between marketing and communications functions and how those respective areas support admissions and institutional advancement.
- Ensure the school recommits to its faculty evaluation process which was paused during COVID and considers formal ways to identify and cultivate the internal leadership pipeline.
- Consider devoting time to create a series of standard operating procedures to formalize hiring protocols, evaluation expectations, communication standards, and all other recurring procedures.

**C. Human Resources**

Human resources at Rutgers Preparatory School include compensation management, benefits management, payroll, time and attendance, onboarding, professional development, annual required training, annual faculty and staff evaluations, and HR operations. While the Self-Study Report also states that the HR department works in talent acquisition (job descriptions, sourcing, evaluating/vetting, hiring), this is not always the case. Most job postings are handled by the division and department heads with direct approval from the Head of School. Some staff and

administrative postings are made by **HR**. There is no standardized checklist for the recruitment process.

The COO and HR director are included at the end of the hiring process for onboarding new employees, which appears to be very thorough. The HR director has created fillable PDFs for required documents to streamline the onboarding process and shortening the time needed to collect onboarding forms. The school contracts with a law firm to fulfill the "Pass the Trash" paperwork requirements for investigation of sexual abuse or misconduct for new hires. RPS conducts all clearances required by New Jersey for new employees. However, while Sage, the dining service provider performs background checks, they do not conduct fingerprint clearance for their employees.

The school has increased its contribution to health insurance for all employees to bring it more in line with other NJ independent school norms. The goal is to increase the contribution from 55% to 75% (closer to the area average of 80%). The current increase is up to about 65%. The school uses an insurance broker (Benefits VIP) as the direct contact for faculty inquiries regarding their insurance. RPS is evaluating a self-insurance model for health benefits due to rising costs.

Rutgers Prep considers five classes a full-time workload for teachers. Any additional classes or duties are paid by a stipend. If the school is unable to provide five classes for a teacher, the faculty member drops down to part-time with a reduction in salary but maintaining their health insurance benefits. Theoretically, staff are evaluated once a year - the process starts in December and is completed in January/February by the employee's manager. New hires are evaluated every six months for the first year.

Employees are encouraged to evolve and are offered leadership opportunities which affirm the school's commitment to personal growth. There are a number of leaders who have held different roles during their tenure at RPS. Employee attrition is very low. Many employees have long tenures at the school which the School attributes to the strong and supportive community at RPS.

**The school is commended for:**

- Digitizing the forms for new hires to create a more efficient onboarding process.
- Having a robust onboarding process that includes mentorship and connection with faculty from other divisions.
- Hiring and retaining talented staff and faculty who are committed to the school's mission.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Create a more standardized recruitment process: use standardized language around the school's mission in public job postings; post jobs on the appropriate platforms; formulate job descriptions and incorporate any potential additional division needs in the job



description; consider an on-line application form; and conduct reference checks in a consistent and thorough manner.

- Review the process for determining new hiring needs so that it is aligned with the budgeting process.
- Develop a 'checklist' for the hiring process to help managers address all hiring protocols and institutional needs.
- Require fingerprint clearance with sub-contractors whose employees have regular exposure to students.

### **III. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM**

#### **A. Curriculum and Instruction**

Rutgers Prep is a vibrant community of learners and teachers. The diversity of students is remarkable. Teachers are clearly empowered to achieve their objectives creatively and pursue their own passions as educators. Conversations indicated a commitment to providing an impactful and student-centered education. The educational program reflects a commitment to meeting the needs of all students. The Lower School classroom climate is warm and playful. Students are polite and attentive in class. The teachers provide a caring environment and thoughtful developmentally appropriate lessons. However, class sizes are larger than in the upper divisions and some of the smaller classrooms feel crowded with furniture and people. In addition, the walls and bulletin boards have an abundance of signs, student work, and bright colors. This can be overwhelming to some people, especially under the fluorescent lights, and out of respect for neurodiversity the faculty might consider limiting the amount on display at a given time. In most of the classes observed, the students were working quietly as a whole class with a teacher at the lead. This is consistent with what was observed in the upper divisions.

The Upper School provides pathways for students of differing abilities and aspirations, with varying degrees of rigor and multiple entry points. Project-based learning provides opportunities for collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity.

Teachers introduce multiple modalities of instruction and do not rely on chalk and talk pedagogy. Desk configurations are established by classroom teachers and they have a lot of autonomy to decide how to best teach their classes. Teachers relate to students as individuals and take the time to relate and differentiate their approach to individual students. Faculty morale is high and teachers value their professional community and their collegiality.

The Science Department has taken a creative approach to meeting the needs of all of the students, and responding to student learning styles with engaging inquiry-based learning opportunities.

There are three levels of each science class in the Upper School. Upper School and Middle School classes most often had numbers of 12-16 students who were actively engaged in discussions or working quietly. Although space appears to be a challenge, the small rooms and small classes create an intimate and conversation-based learning environment.

The commitment to the individual student celebrated in the Mission Statement is manifested in an independent spirit amongst faculty and staff. Teachers enjoy the freedom of incorporating their own interests into the classroom activities. A wonderful, positive energy of creativity is palpable when speaking with faculty. However, it is apparent that there are opportunities for greater connection across divisions, grades, and subjects. For example, on a given fall day, teachers in different grades were teaching children about the life cycle of a pumpkin without the benefit of working together.

Departmental/subject area organization varies.. Some departments exist separately within each division. Others span the Middle School and Upper School, and a few reach from Lower School to Upper School. When a department is limited to a single division, vertical articulation is not fully realized. Greater collaboration can generate support and connections across the community. For example, environmental education is happening in different pockets evidently without the robust sharing of ideas or support. A committee or shared collaborative process across grades and divisions would provide greater support for individual efforts and provide increased longevity for projects and initiatives. An inter-divisional team could make plans and recommendations to the wider community. Including Lower School teachers in departmental meetings would be a good first step in generating greater collaboration and communication, looking for opportunities to create meaningful teams to support faculty and student ideas as has happened with AID and the initiative for professional development and curriculum updates in support of DEIB.

**The school is commended for:**

- Fostering faculty agency and creativity.
- Hiring a new learning support person for the Lower School.
- Engaging department chairs and creating a culture of collegiality.
- Including project-based learning to expand critical thinking.
- Encouraging teacher autonomy thus creating a multi-dimensional teaching expectations that aligns with many different students' learning styles.
- Differentiating learning for students.
- Realizing high faculty morale.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Encourage greater collaborative efforts across the school and provide support in the form of faculty committees for key initiatives such as Global Awareness and Environmental Stewardship.

- Declutter, refresh, and relight Lower School spaces.
- Expand curriculum mapping among all three divisions to guarantee shared information for vertical alignment.
- Analyze space challenges.

## **1. English/Language Arts**

Despite being described as wholly academic and analytical in the Self-Study, the programming observed in English classes at RPS was also creative and student-centered while maintaining the standards expected for the grade level. Students were engaged and able to connect with the source literature or media. All of the English teachers at the Middle and Upper School levels stepped back and let the students take over and lead discussions or structured activities. Multiple teachers referenced creative projects in students' futures. There is pride in the extracurricular activities offered around literature and sharing creative writing within the Upper School.

The Lower School has a strong literacy program, and books have recently been updated to better reflect the school's commitment to DEIB. Lower School classes were observed enjoying seasonal reading aloud in several classes. Students were encouraged to make self to text connections. The classroom environment was literacy rich, with letters, phonemes, and parts of speech posted on the walls. Student writing was also displayed. Typical class-wide beginning of the year writing assignments, such as "All About Me," were displayed on many classroom bulletin boards.

Reading and writing play an especially important role in a Lower School curriculum where students are acquiring the tools that they will rely on for the rest of their lives. The English language arts curriculum in the Lower School progresses from those basic writing assignments about themselves and their classmates to larger projects in the later grades, such as research about a notable New Jersey resident in third grade and the Journey's project in fourth grade. Fifth graders, when we visited the classroom, were working on a year-long story about "superhero me," a well thought out and engaging writing work that is perfect for that age. The experiences that the Lower School students have in writing down their own thoughts will prepare them for the work of the upper grades.

The Self-Study did not list any challenges for the English program. There appear to be resources for all English classes, including high levels of literature or film-centered decoration in some classrooms. In the Middle and Upper Schools, students are required to purchase their own texts. There is a feeling that division heads can focus their energy on the Upper School classes due to outside requirements from College Board and college applications. Middle School English teachers are not always aware of the curriculum in the Upper School, which can lead to unintentional duplication.

**The school is commended for:**

- Creating in the Middle and Upper School English classes student-centered lessons or a student-led activity.
- Establishing the literacy-rich environments in the Lower School classrooms.
- Committing to the discipline of writing and its function as a key medium of self-expression.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Increase communication between the Middle and Upper School English teachers to ensure vertical alignment and to create a cohesive transition to the Upper School.
- Evaluate the use of "traditional" literature in the Middle and Upper School classrooms. While the poetry units are clearly incorporating many different points of view, the assigned novels in each grade level could be more expansive in their viewpoints.

## **2. History/Social Studies**

The Humanities Department that comprises grades 6-12 has experienced some important changes over the past 10 years. Foundationally, the department itself was created since the last Decennial process was completed. History and English are the two disciplines that constitute the department which is led by two co-chairs. Although the department is tasked with managing grades 6-12, its current focus is mostly on curricular work in the Upper School grades. Several reasons were provided for this, mainly the fact that there are no honors courses offered for 9th grade history or English, therefore the freshmen humanities curriculum is focused on "leveling" their students, giving rising RPS 9th graders and 9th grade students new to RPS opportunities to master the core skills and content of the course together. In addition, the professional relationship between the Middle School and the Upper School is such that each has a chair/head with substantial experience in the other division's department. This allows for congruence in communication and understanding.

Just prior to the pandemic, the Humanities Department embarked on a re-evaluation of its curriculum, starting with its 10th grade courses. This was driven primarily by a new daily block schedule. In sophomore English, longer fiction that focused more on western ideas and themes were replaced with books that are shorter and reflect a more global perspective. This complements the culture of global awareness that permeates the school's community. This process will continue as each grade's curriculum will be evaluated, first English and then history, in order to reflect the diversity of the community and best fit in consideration of the schedule. At the outset of the pandemic, professional development was offered in the area of project-based learning. Within the culture of autonomy at RPS, some humanities faculty adapted PBL to their teaching. Like most

initiatives at RPS, the results are seen in the organic nature of the implementation of PBL. Some teachers in the department have embraced it and use it regularly, others have experimented with it, and still others have not. This has continued since returning to a full on-campus learning environment.

The future of the department looks exciting. There will be an evaluation of the purpose and viability of adding honors sections to specific courses, starting with a discussion on the United States History course. They will continue to encourage the use of PBL within the framework of RPS autonomous teaching environment, and the technical proficiency that many department faculty gained will still be utilized. The recent addition to an intentional department mentoring structure to coach new faculty (two this year) has been successful and will continue. With the Head of School's support, the course reduction for one chair has been beneficial in finding time to meet regularly with new faculty to address issues both in and out of the classroom.

**The school is commended for:**

- The flexibility and willingness to explore new curricular ideas and pedagogical practices. The implementation of project-based learning in the department illustrates this as well as the reevaluation of course offerings and sequencing in light of a recent daily schedule change.
- The addition of the responsibility for department mentoring that solely focuses on new faculty by providing a course reduction speaks to RPS and the department's ability to prioritize its resources in areas of the most need.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Continue to explore opportunities between divisions, particularly the Middle and Upper Schools to identify curricular opportunities that serve both student bodies well. This may include how the impending revisioning of the library space as a center could serve as a space for research and writing.
- Consider the impact of implementing honors-level classes into a department that currently offers AP courses as its advanced-level curriculum. Questions of where honors-level coursework would sit and how it could have an impact on the department's AP program need to be evaluated.

### **3. World Languages**

The Self-Study states that the language program at RPS begins at the Lower School in Kindergarten and runs through the fifth grade with the Cultural Exploration program. In this program the students explore and experience multiculturalism in a highly interactive project-based format. The Cultural Exploration Program is a geographical or social sciences program that

includes an introduction to phrases in languages from around the world, but does not include formal language instruction.

The Middle School language curriculum begins with Latin culture and language in the 6th and 7th grades, with emphasis on learning grammatical concepts. The Self-Study states that eighth grade students can choose between Chinese, French, Latin, and Spanish as an entry point into the Upper School language program. Successful completion of Language Level I in eighth grade ensures students continue to the next level in ninth grade.

The Upper School curriculum builds on previously acquired skills and knowledge with emphasis on reading, writing, and speaking. The Self-Study states that four languages are offered (Chinese, French, Latin, and Spanish); New students take placement tests to place at their level of proficiency.

Students are required to take at least two consecutive years of the same language, and many of the Upper School students take a world language for all four years of their high school career, often due to requirements for college applications. Due to a staffing shortage, some Upper School Spanish classes have 25 or more students. Despite these large classes, the teachers maintain the target language and include all of their students in speaking opportunities. The World Languages Department sponsors a number of clubs and activities throughout the year including clubs for all languages taught in the Upper School.

The world language program integrates effective and innovative instruction in each language with a curriculum that incorporates grammar, literature, culture, and technology, offering individual students the opportunity to communicate in the target language at their highest level of proficiency. In modern languages, students work with native and near-native language professionals and with each other. In the classroom the teachers provide varied activities that address different modes of learning. Most observed classes were taught almost exclusively in the target language, with students responding in the target language, while a few were conducted primarily in English with no target language coming from the students.

All non-Western languages have been or are in the process of being phased out due to low enrollment.

**The school is commended for:**

- Developing global citizens in the Upper School by promoting engagement with authentic primary sources.
- Allowing students studying Arabic to still receive credit for their language studies despite the language only being offered as an independent study.
- Modifying and differentiating instruction at all levels in every division.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Review the status of the world language program in the Lower School in relation to regularly scheduled language acquisition instruction. Language acquisition at an early age is foundational and Pre-K to 5th grade offers a critical "window of opportunity" for learning a new language.
- Visit and confer with other schools with similar populations that teach non-western languages to view other successful models.
- In support of developing fluency, evaluate adding a third year of a world language as a graduation requirement in the Upper School.

**4. Mathematics**

The approach to mathematics at Rutgers Prep is developmental and aligns to the mission of the school. Pathways in mathematics are differentiated according to a student's age and abilities.

In the early childhood program, students explore and discover mathematical concepts through hands-on and experiential learning. Math in Focus (Singapore Math) begins in Kindergarten; it builds upon and extends the hands-on learning with its progression from the concrete, to pictorial, and finally abstract. We observed students at work with hands-on activities that teach problem solving and mathematical thinking.

Middle School and Upper School students have the opportunity to progress through a course of study that is suited to their own interests and abilities in terms of pace and rigor. All students are required to take three-and-a-half years of math, but they have the opportunity to progress slowly or quickly through the curriculum in Middle School. Students who advance quickly in math may take higher level courses in Upper School. Beyond the competence in mathematics, there are opportunities for collaboration and critical thinking, such as the apps that students create in computer science.

After finishing fifth grade Math in Focus, the students take pre-algebra in sixth grade but there are gaps between the two curricula, and students may not be fully prepared to be successful in the current Middle School program. Although there are options for students to take Algebra 1 in the seventh grade or spread it over seventh and eighth grades, not all students are ready for the necessary abstract thinking and need remediation when they take Algebra 2. A close examination of the vertical alignment may help to address these concerns.

**The school is commended for:**

- Offering multiple pathways in Upper School math to meet the needs of students of different needs and interests.
- Implementing Innovative and project-based learning, such as student-created apps in Computer Science.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Work together across divisions to establish vertical alignment of the math curriculum so that students are better prepared for the transitions from Lower School to Middle School to Upper School.
- Consider an alternative math course for Middle School students who are not developmentally ready for abstract thinking in the eighth grade.

**5. Science**

The RPS science department and program stands out as a bright star amongst other excellent school programs. The past decade has brought considerable and commendable changes to the department in an effort to respond to the past accreditation recommendations, and the results are evident. The department revolves its work around the Mission Statement and has created a K-12 program that provides the flexibility and curriculum to inspire students to discover and pursue their passion and embrace intellectual curiosity and creativity.

Rutgers Prep's science curriculum cultivates curiosity, critical thinking, and questioning skills through a thoughtful, creative, and rigorous K-12 curriculum. Starting in the Lower School, students are immersed in hands-on learning experiences that inspire them to hone their observation, inquiry, and investigation skills.

Over the past few years, Middle School science teachers immersed themselves in professional development, with a focus on Learning and the Brain conferences, to rethink their curriculum in ways that best reflect Middle Schoolers brain development and what's needed for the best academic experience. The results are remarkable and their efforts are commendable. The focus on hands-on learning to teach the scientific method and scientific thought continues in Middle School. Students are challenged to think as scientists and to communicate in a clear and concise manner. The classwork also builds social and cooperative skills through collaborative labs and projects. Middle School science students were observed in a CSI-like investigative class in which they were using scientific methods to decipher clues and solve problems. The learning was authentic, engaging, and hands-on, and the students were displaying the necessary skills for success throughout the Upper School curriculum. Lower and Middle School students' science experience is enhanced by a stand-alone STEAM class that cultivates many of the important skills needed for science success. The students are planning, building, iterating, and troubleshooting in a collaborative and inspirational setting.

In the Upper School, the curriculum is flexible enough to accommodate multiple science paths, which was an intentional department goal after its last accreditation process. From introduction classes to upper level honors and AP classes, the department cultivates interest and discovery while offering a rigorous and high-level curriculum. In observing Upper School science classes, many things were clear: the teachers are highly qualified; teachers are passionate about the material; and



the students were on task, interested, and engaging with the teacher and the work.

In addition to the ongoing efforts the school has taken to create an ethos of environmental sustainability throughout its program, a commitment to environmental stewardship is also evident in the science program. Environmental science classes are offered, and there are other curricular expressions of this commitment. In the Upper School, ninth-grade students have an option to take Environmental Science. Juniors and Seniors have the option of taking Advanced Placement Environmental Science.

The department deserves commendation for doing an exemplary and authentic job ensuring that diverse perspectives and backgrounds are not only represented in the curriculum, but also that they are a core part of it. The department can point to countless lessons and units that push student thinking and encourage them to think differently about themselves and the world around them.

One of the greatest challenges faced by the department revolves around course registration, placement, and staffing. The department is eager to best serve each student -- hence a flexible curricular approach -- yet they would benefit from opportunities for greater communication throughout the year, especially at pinch points when cross-divisional communication is most essential. Department members are also eager for more time to collaborate with other teachers in the department and across other disciplines, yet teaching loads of five or six classes make that difficult.

**The school is commended for:**

- Seeking age-appropriate and research-backed ways to cultivate critical thinking and questioning skills throughout the curriculum.
- Committing to hands-on learning, individual discovery, and curriculum flexibility to allow for multiple science pathways.
- Creating authentic and innovative lessons and units that ensure diverse backgrounds and perspectives are represented throughout the science curriculum.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Seek opportunities for periodic meeting times to allow for K-12 science teachers to adequately plan for student transitions between divisions, which has an impact on course registration, staffing, and placement.
- In lieu of reduced teaching loads, consider creative ways to ensure teachers have adequate time for departmental and cross-discipline collaboration.

## 6. Performing Arts

Rutgers Prep has a gifted performing arts faculty and provides broad curricular offerings. Students are intentionally exposed to performing arts in all three divisions, a tradition that has contributed to consistent enrollment in Upper School performing arts electives in recent years, along with a graduation requirement and a protected class block. Adding dance has been a great way to entice even more students to incorporate arts into their day. In addition to providing students the opportunity to hone their creative techniques, the performing arts curriculum is possibly one of the most overt ways that RPS reinforces and reflects its mission. Students are clearly inspired to discover new passions through the enticing courses and engaging lessons that teach and celebrate the arts, supporting ongoing creativity and curiosity. In addition, students hone effective leadership skills while taking risks on stage, as members of collaborative performance ensembles, and while exploring viewpoints different from their own. A strength of the department is cross-divisional collaboration, particularly in music, as all three provide opportunities for students to explore the discipline.

The department expressed a concern around resources in a number of ways. The Blackbox theater, while outfitted beautifully, only has capacity for 100 and will be further reduced after the retractable seats are delivered and assembled. Musical performances and musical theater productions are presented offsite, which carries staging and rehearsing challenges, as well as issues of additional costs incurred by damage to instruments. This model also reduces RPS' ability to effectively showcase the arts for internal and external marketing, build community around the arts, or allow students the full benefit of a large organic audience. The music cohort did, however, acknowledge that musical ensembles are visible on campus, often performing at morning meeting or at athletic games; however the spaces available on campus are not acoustically sound and thus can be compromising to the performance. Performing arts faculty feel somewhat isolated from capital projects and planning. Increased communication between the arts professionals will support their needs and mitigate against their feelings of isolation.

### **The school is commended for:**

- Adding the dance program to the curriculum.
- Creating a breadth of curriculum and fostering student agency in coursework.
- Encouraging intentional leadership skill development and exploring the viewpoints of others.
- Establishing cross-division curricular work that provides opportunities for older students to work with younger students.
- Maximizing available space for performance, rehearsal, and displaying student work.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Prioritize the need for an all-community performance and gathering space in campus planning.
- In lieu of an onsite performance venue, consider ways to institutionally support venue-based rehearsals and healthy, enthusiastic attendance.
- Continue to evaluate the impact of senior dismissal and sports on the 9th period.
- Include performing arts faculty in the planning stages of any consideration of further facilities for the arts.

## **7. Visual Arts**

The scope of the visual arts program inspires student creativity and exploration. Students may choose from a plethora of options in the arts (visual and performance) and cultivate their artistic proclivities under the guidance of dedicated and devoted specialized professionals. The architecture and design sequence demonstrates the school's commitment to creative education in tandem with functionality and preparation for real world experience. Art courses are academic in nature and are structured to enhance learning but not at the expense of creativity. The visual arts teaches students how to see, observe, and reflect, skill sets that will inform all aspects of student learning and living. Projects observed were both highly creative in nature and execution. In addition, the visual arts faculty have a talent for creating spaces that are warm, peaceful, and engaging.

**The school is commended for:**

- Diversifying its curricular program by emphasizing the importance of the arts which colors life's images and defines contours of experience like no other specialty. By offering a variety of visual arts courses, the school is projecting to its students that their talents and interests can be applied through different media and are not constrained to one convention.
- Engaging visual artists whose level of professionalism and teacher acumen raises the learning bar for visual arts students. Some members of the visual arts faculty have galleries and shows, include their students in their own creations, and discuss their artistic interests. Teachers' excitement for their artistic expression is infectious (in the best of ways) and students recognize that passion is part of creation.
- Showcasing visual art beautifully throughout campus, with high-level treatments, displays, prints, and frames.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Vary the class schedule so that when students must leave school early for competitive activities they do not miss arts class time.
- Dedicate a gallery space for the safe display of high level student art and that of visiting artists and alumni. A gallery space would serve to showcase their work and inspire

others to value and appreciate the arts.

## **8. Physical Education**

The Physical Education Department is embedded in the daily life of almost every student at RPS. The department is cross-divisional in nature and provides opportunities for students to explore and excel in physical activity, whether in a physical education class environment or through competitive sports.

The faculty/coaches work closely together to support each other and their students. Unique to the physical education curriculum is the co-teaching that occurs in the Upper School, and the daily meeting with Lower School students. In addition, the Middle School program allows student choice; Middle Schoolers have two weeks to explore and choose a sport based on interest or they can opt for a traditional physical education class.

All PE faculty serve as coaches and provide feedback in the form of comments in communications with parents. In addition, the faculty are in close communication with the Lower School to assess the physical needs of its students.

### **The school is commended for:**

- Establishing a physical Education department that has a school-wide impact, providing PK-12 with opportunities for physical development and student self-awareness of their physical health.
- Requiring all physical education faculty to coach at least one extracurricular sport, allowing them to strengthen their relationship with students and provide opportunities for informal assessments of student development.

### **The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Establish a committee to build a vertical relationship with the Health and Wellness program, identifying areas in both curricula that can inform one another. Such an initiative would ideally begin in the Lower School to establish healthy decisions and habits early in each student's career at RPS.
- With limited time for Upper School physical education classes, and in light of not requiring sports participation, find time in the daily schedule to increase the frequency of physical education classes to help establish healthy decision-making and habits in preparation for the impending student transition to college.

## **B. Remote Instruction**

*N/A* - No remote Instruction is currently being offered.

## **C. Support Services: Learning Support, Counseling, Advising, Health, and Wellness**

### **Learning Support:**

*The D'Aloia Center for Teaching and Learning Support* was created to help students achieve their academic goals by encouraging responsibility, empowerment, and self-advocacy. The learning support program provides students with learning differences the ability to maximize their involvement in their own learning and development. Rutgers Prep does not charge additional fees for the learning support program and all students are eligible with a demonstrated need.

Rutgers Prep accepts a range of learners including students diagnosed with a learning difference. The program services students that have been formally diagnosed with learning differences prior to attending Rutgers Prep and students that are in need of learning support and not formally diagnosed but are identified by classroom teachers or advisors and referred to the learning support program for appropriate testing.

All students who seek learning support are evaluated, and those with more advanced needs are formally tested and provided with accommodations at Rutgers Prep.

- The Learning Specialists work with the student and develops strategies and accommodations that best fit them. The Visiting Team visited the learning center and observed the close and meaningful relationships the students have with the specialists. The students have scheduled periods in which they are required to attend the learning center. They do homework, study for
- tests, or plan a long-term project. The specialist is there to help them. The specialist contacts the subject teacher if further accommodations are needed for a certain assignment.

The support specialists meet with divisional administration every other week as part of the Student Support Team (SST) to provide updates on students of concern within the program. The learning support specialists and school counselors are part of the SST that meets every other week to discuss students. If there is a need for outside testing, the learning support specialists work closely with the public or private agency through the process and implement recommendations into accommodations for the students.

The new learning specialist started in the Lower School this year; previously the only learning support was provided by the county. The LS learning support person is working closely with the LS principal, who is helping to integrate her into the program. A classroom in the Lower School

has been made available for the program, and provides a welcoming home base for Lower School students with learning differences. The work of the Learning Specialist is an important step in increasing access to the curriculum for all students. The Middle and Upper School support centers are conducive for remediating and supporting students.

### **Advisory, Guidance, and Counseling:**

The Rutgers Preparatory School Counseling Department provides a number of different programs and services to the families in the Lower, Middle, and Upper Schools through guidance classes, an advisory program, and required Health and Wellness courses in the Middle and Upper Schools.

Counseling services are available on an individual basis for any family whose child is struggling psychologically, socially, emotionally, or behaviorally. All members of the Counseling Department are licensed mental health clinicians. The counseling program works with families and students to support the emotional and mental well being of all students. If there is further concern, counselors will contact families to recommend outside counseling services and serve as the liaison between the school and outside counseling. School counselors provide updates during SST meetings to the administration.

The Lower School Counselor meets weekly with the Lower School Principal and Director of Admissions. The Middle School Counselor meets regularly with the Middle School Administration. In the Upper School, the Student Support Team (SST), composed of the school counselors and learning support specialists, meets every other week with the Upper School administration.

If a Lower School student is identified as not meeting expectations, the parents are contacted and invited to a meeting. The goal of the meeting is to share specific information about the student's progress and identify where improvements need to be made, and then formulate a plan for achieving this improvement. The school works in partnership with parents to keep the parents informed by touching base periodically to see if the plan is working. If improvements are not made, the Lower School Division Principal then discusses educational testing with the family. Student reports are sent home by teachers to alert parents and advisors become the point person for the student to facilitate communication among teachers.

In the Middle School and Upper Schools, referrals to school counselors and learning support specialists are made when classroom teachers and/or advisors notice inappropriate behaviors or struggles academically. Middle School and Upper School administrators are informed by school counselors and learning support specialists at regularly scheduled meetings.

In all divisions, if termination of a student's enrollment is being considered, either immediately or for the following academic year, the division administration works closely with the Head of School to determine the appropriate course of action moving forward.

### **Health and Wellness:**

RPS staffs the Health Office located in the center of campus near the Upper School and conveniently close to the Lower School and Middle School and to where both Early Birds and the After School Program (ASP) gather. Registered Nurses are on campus from 7:30 am until the end of ASP.

A team member visited the nurse's office. The nurses meet twice a year with the Middlesex Education Services to get updated on the new guidelines. The school follows the local and state guidelines they get through the Middlesex Educational Services Commission for hearing/ vision/ scoliosis testing and any protocols about administering medications.

NJ State, through the local Educational Services Commission (ESC) provides funds to pay for a portion of the nursing salaries for work performed on days when school is in session. Rutgers Prep pays the difference from their regular hourly rate vs. what they are paid by the ESC only for days school is in session. Summer hours are not paid by the ESC.

There are protocols in place for the handling of medical emergencies during the school day, during athletic and other special events, and for following up on a student accident, injury, or illness. According to the nurses, the athletic trainers follow protocols that start with injury prevention and move to injury treatment and coordinate and report to the nurse's office. All information pertaining to student health is housed electronically in the RPS "SnapHealth" computer program for which only Rutgers Prep health professionals have access. Any paper records are kept in locked cabinets in the Health Office or in storage in the Upper School basement.

The nurses are following the CDC COVID protocols, having staff, faculty, and students stay away for five days, and come back only when testing negative, and wearing a mask. They email teachers to inform them they have a student in their office.

The school has a Dining Commons center that includes a full kitchen where food is prepared for the entire population on campus (faculty, staff, and students). Lunch is the primary meal served.

The food service provider, Sage Dining Services, is the school's outsourced food services provider. Sage's Spotlight Program provides education and guidance on the nutritional value of the food offered, and posts it. Sage Dining is ServSafe certified and the school's entire food services operation is inspected twice a year by the New Jersey Department of Health. The

personnel have a background check but are not fingerprinted.

Provisions for students with severe food allergies and/or dietary restrictions are made. The school nurses keep the dining services informed about the dietary restrictions so they can adjust their menu. In more complicated cases the family meets with the dining services to give them more information. Food for highly sensitive individuals is kept in a separate refrigerator. The manager of the dining service team meets and checks in with the Head of School's administrative assistant once a week. He meets with the student council once every two weeks on the menu choices.

The school provides a health and wellness program across the grade levels to promote healthy life choices and an understanding of peer relationships, gender, and sexuality. The Lower School has a Guidance program, a formal class for Pre-K through 4th grade, provided by a licensed staff counselor. In 5th grade, the course transitions to Leadership class. The Middle School and Upper School run a required Health and Wellness courses through all grade levels. These programs, part of the academic program in all divisions, are highlighted in the marketing materials, the website, and the Upper School Curriculum Guide.

College counselors add to the vibrancy and the dynamic approach to health and wellness. Knowing that college is a major stressor for juniors and seniors, counselors put health and wellness at the center of their professional practice. They encourage students to be mindful of stress and stressors and teach them techniques to de-stress. Students appreciate their concern and consequently trust counselors to help through the college admissions process.

**The school is commended for:**

- Providing advisory, guidance, and counseling systems and services across all divisions at Rutgers Prep.
- Conducting psycho-educational testing for students who indicate a learning difference, arranging a range of classroom accommodations and access to Learning Support.
- Allotting the study periods to the students with the learning specialists.
- Establishing robust and intentional programming for Health and Wellness.
- Hiring a dedicated and compassionate nursing staff.
- Opening and enveloping a Zen Center under the guidance of the College Office, demonstrating to the community the importance of self-care.



**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Arrange for cross-divisional time for guidance and counseling staff. The counselors are self-directed and work independently of each other. The team in the Middle and Upper School would benefit from a point person to ensure a cohesive, collaborative approach to guidance and counseling in the three divisions.
- Continue to evaluate learning support staffing levels as increased enrollment across all divisions and an increased need for learning support combine for greater need of this resource.
- Consider creating a Health and Wellness department with an administrative level leadership position to oversee the nurses, health and wellness teachers, and school guidance counselors.

**D. Discipline**

Discipline is appropriately differentiated by division. In the Lower School, discipline is relational and consists of support and understanding for the needs of individual children and communication between the administration, counselor, teacher, and parents. In the Upper School, it is characterized by clarity of expectations, connections through advisory, and a system of demerits and detention. Behavioral and academic discipline, as well as the academic advisory program, fall under the purview of the Upper School Office of the Assistant Principal. The current Assistant Principal was appointed just before the school transitioned to remote learning in late 2020, and she was tasked with pivoting to an educational environment where adjustments were required. This included revisiting behavioral discipline as well as academic advising.

One of the most significant challenges was the continuity of the community's close knit atmosphere, especially in September of 2020 when the 9th grade orientation was canceled. This loss was mitigated by an online program that was assembled to provide an alternate experience that could provide opportunities to introduce and reinforce the importance of the RPS community in terms of respect and inclusivity.

The current Assistant Principal is focused on strengthening the school culture in several areas including student dress code, consistent documentation of both behavioral and academic violations, and a robust advisory program. Student dress code is encountering a possible transition in consideration of changing cultural norms. There is a focus on consistent documentation of infractions in order to best serve the learning component of disciplinary actions. The Upper School advisory program is the foundation of establishing and sustaining the school culture.

Attention to responsibility, respect, and accountability, especially in social media environments is a current focus.

**The school is commended for:**

- Its nimble response to the pandemic in light of its 9th grade orientation. By pivoting from its traditional camping/retreat to building community through online activities and exercises, RPS was able to provide experiences for its new Upper School students to learn about the expectations and traditions of the institution.
- The use of the Social Institute, a resource that provides a grade-specific curriculum that addresses responsibility with the use of social media and other online platforms. The impact of this has been seen in the significant decrease in cell phone usage by students in the classroom and in school-wide meetings.
- Its weekly and biweekly student support meetings, which consist of each division's Assistant Principals, Class Deans, school counselors, and learning specialists in order to identify and track students who demonstrate behavioral or academic concerns.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Re-evaluate dress code enforcement and standards for the dress code, especially in light of the relaxation of the policy during the pandemic.
- Ensure clearer communication and accountability for faculty in the area of documenting academic integrity as to provide a clearer record for future student evaluation.

**E. Secondary School and College and Career Counseling**

The College and Career Counseling professionals reprioritized their craft by putting the student and health and wellness at the center of the process. As found in many other areas of faculty practice, counselors first ask what is best for each child before engaging in specifics of the process. This approach reinforces for students the goals and objectives for college choice - not prestige but best match. The emphasis on well-being becomes the foundation for all learning. To reflect this priority, the college counselors created a Zen Room to underscore the importance of self-care. The clarity of this message is helpful in providing a counter balance to the pressures of college admissions. The counselors' focus also serves as a subtle message to teachers about educational priorities, proportionality, and balance. The counselors also work closely with admissions to stem attrition. They have a unique sway over parents and taking a seat at the admissions table instills confidence in the efficacy and value of RPS. The Mission Statement guides counselors' engagement and it empowers them to speak about what's important to them and the school. Counselors work well with their colleagues across disciplines and from their narrative, teachers are vested in the college process and to assist students in their quest for reaching their goals.

**The school is commended for:**

- Fostering meaningful collaboration with learning specialists, admissions, faculty, and guidance and counseling personnel to produce the best outcome for students.
- Establishing a school culture where the high school leadership and the Head of School are not getting caught in bragging points around college admissions and for giving the counselors the room they need to help students aspire for achievement yet shield them from stress and allow a light on their profiles so that they can get a real sense of themselves.
- Addressing student fragility and making space (literally and figuratively) to make wellness and commonplace discussion available.
- Establishing a pre-college counselor that helps students with questions and concerns that have not yet been assigned a college counselor.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Continue to assuage the anxiety associated with the competitive nature of college admissions, as the counseling staff has already established.

**F. Co-Curricular Activities/Athletics**

RPS's co-curricular offerings are a strong complement to their academic program. Each division offers either clubs or athletics or both. Middle School students are required to try team sports for the first two weeks of school and then may transition to a PE class if they desire. Middle School PE and athletics take place at the same time. The Theater and Dance Department runs drama productions in the fall and spring, and a dance show highlights dancers from the Middle and Upper Schools. The Art Gallery displays visual art from students and professional faculty throughout the year. Events such as the annual Diwali show and school musical encourage school wide participation.

The co-curricular activities and athletics follow the part of the school's mission of, "We inspire students to discover and pursue their passions." Upper School clubs are student-led and require a faculty advisor as well as approval and registration with the Upper School Assistant Principal.

There is not currently any guidance for clubs to transition to new leadership, as this has always happened organically in the past. With co-curriculars becoming more of a booster to college applications, clubs and competition to become club leaders have become more of an issue. The recent allowance of affinity groups has allowed for students to find space to express themselves. The ArgoNation Club is an athletic student support club that organizes student attendance at athletic events, bridging clubs and athletics. The Self-Study states that building additional multi-use spaces is a part of the school's next capital campaign.

The school's athletic programs maintain a no-cut policy that encourages students to step out of

their comfort zones and try new sports even if they have not previously demonstrated proficiency. With over 80% of the Upper School participating in athletics, the school commits to keeping students involved at any level.

**The school is commended for:**

- Promoting a significant number of clubs in the Upper School and allowing for affinity groups to meet and plan school-wide cultural events.
- Maintaining a no-cut athletics policy and keeping over 80% of the Upper School student body engaged in athletics.
- Encouraging mentorship between the Upper School and Middle/Lower students through clubs and athletics.
- Keeping co-curricular offerings fair and inclusive.
- Finding a way to fund a good idea that benefits students, maintaining the student-centered focus of Rutgers Prep.
- Engaging an operations staff that is deft, creative, and patient in setting up a variety of rooms for various functions and performances in support of the program and in recognition of space limitations.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Develop a standard transition process for Upper School club leadership
- Add additional multi-use spaces for co-curricular activities
- Address the issue of needing more time for co-curricular activities.
- Review and redesign the job descriptions and assessment process of the various Athletic Leaders so that an enhanced clarity of job responsibilities and accountability is reached.

#### **IV. TECHNOLOGY**

The IT department has managed to create a culture of accessibility and support and they are proud of the way students, faculty, and staff come and go freely. The faculty and staff support this claim and confirm that the IT staff know them and actively support their objectives. They acknowledge that traffic has not returned to pre-COVID levels, but they are confident that it will rebound in time.

Rutgers Prep is a 1:1 device school, with devices chosen specifically to support different age groups - Lower School, Chromebooks; Middle School, iPads; and the Upper School iPads+ personal choice.

The IT department also seems to have critical involvement in a number of areas.. Given that it is such a strength for the school, Rutgers Prep might consider further bolstering their resources.

RPS IT is confident in their firewall, which was replaced in the last five years. The school recently had a ransomware attack, which proved benign because they do not store any sensitive data on their servers. The attack did however prompt a thorough security audit led by their insurance company.

The audit confirmed the strength of their systems, identifying only one vulnerability - related to how they were providing remote access to a single employee. They closed that portal and installed a different VPN. At the behest of their insurance company, they are currently in the process of implementing two-factor authentication for all community users. Employees have been onboarded and Upper School students are next. They are working through appropriate solutions for their younger students. The school has published data privacy policies which are known and supported by all employees.

RPS previously supported Smart TVs in all of its classrooms. However, the technology was costly to maintain and subject to aging hardware and software. They have now installed projectors and Apple TVs in each classroom and are confident they are meeting the needs of their students and faculty.

**The school is commended for:**

- Successful support of the development and implementation of a variety of signature spaces -- Maker space, STEAM room, Bloomberg Lab, etc.
- The way the professional staff at RPS responded to and supported its students and faculty through COVID.
- Their investment in the Blackbaud suite of services. The community is largely very happy with the way they serve the community and integrate. Marcom (Finalsite) and Health Services (Snap Health) seem to be the only systems that remain independent. However, Finalsite's key dynamic functionality is synchronized with Blackbaud. ArgoNet, the school's learning management system (LMS) is ubiquitous and serves all constituents well.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Consider auditing the IT department's workload and project pace. Given that it is such a strength for the school, and that the IT department seems to have critical involvement in a number of areas, Rutgers Prep might consider bolstering their resources further.
- Given the evolving needs of its students and faculty and increased need for laptops in the Upper School, IT should continue to work with school leadership to assess and modify, if necessary, its device requirement and device management system.
- Give consideration to library function in order to create a stronger relationship with Middle and Upper School usage and programming that can leverage research and resources for its students. Having the library staff serve as a resource for teaching in addition to a curator of resources would expand its work into student life areas that may not be currently under their purview. The library is in the early stages of a re-imagining of its space as well as its purpose.
- Evaluate refreshing the WiFi infrastructure, as stated in the Self-Study.

## **V. ADVANCEMENT**

### **A. Enrollment Management: Admissions, Retention, and Financial Aid**

The Admission Office benefits from a team of professionals who are heavily invested in the RPS community and exude joy for its educational opportunities. The office prioritizes getting to know applicants and pivoted well to virtual meetings and events during COVID. RPS enjoyed a bump in yield in FY21 and FY22 and boasts a full enrollment of mission-appropriate students in 2022.

However, there is some concern around how long a post-Covid bump may last.

The admissions process begins with a phone call with the assistant admission counselor, who fields parents' initial questions. Parents are then encouraged to submit an application before coming to school for a tour, because the admissions office finds they are unable to meet the demand for tours with all families. While practical, this may prevent the counselors from having sufficient opportunity to convey RPS' greatest attributes and institutional promises at a critical time in the process of discovery for families.

The Admission Office offers a series of admission-focused virtual and in-person events each year. They make efforts to ensure that these events reflect school culture and related interactions are family-friendly and low-pressure. Having recently transitioned to the common application, the admissions professionals believe that this has reduced the barrier to applications to such a degree that they often have stealth applicants-- families who apply having no prior office interaction. It also yields a higher number of incomplete applications.

A high percentage (46%) of students receive financial aid. The school is committed to admitting students who will benefit from a RPS education and contribute to the school and does not want finances to be an obstacle. However, as explained in the school's Self-Study, the percentage of students receiving aid has escalated, especially after the financial crisis of 2008. The Visiting Team recommends a review and if necessary, an update to the school's financial aid philosophy and policy and evaluating the sustainability of its current financial aid allocation as part of the long-range financial planning. Also, there is no system in place to provide tuition assistance for other expenses related to the RPS experience, although people report that families who need extra support to participate in programs, such as travel, may appeal to the Head of School for assistance.

An admission committee, including faculty and athletic personnel, offers a broad perspective on a student's ability to thrive at RPS. The team would like to broaden its emphasis on the lower grades as entry points for prospective families and is interested in partnering with MarCom and other school administrators to chart a collaborative course. The recommended updates to the ECEC and Lower School facilities would help to present the Lower School as a desirable and competitive entry point.

**The school is commended for:**

- Full enrollment and an exceptional yield in FY22.
- The admissions counselors and admissions Committee's ability to identify mission-appropriate students who by all accounts come to thrive at RPS.
- The highly evident pride and passion for RPS that the admission team brings to its work; and its ability to articulate the mission and evidence of its value.
- Creatively considering how RPS might attract more tuition capable families, across divisions and specifically in lower grades.
- Collecting data from new students and families who chose not to apply or enroll.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Review and if necessary, update the financial aid philosophy and policy and evaluate the sustainability of current financial aid allocation.
- Consider adjustments to the financial aid formula or another approach that would allow students receiving tuition assistance to fully benefit from all aspects of the RPS program.
- Consider ways in which senior admission officers might communicate RPS' value proposition with prospective families earlier in the process and prior to a family's decision to apply.
- Expand data collection to include current families and create discussion-based opportunities for the senior administrative team to discuss themes, challenges, and opportunities for unified strategic messaging.
- Work with MarCom to develop division-specific key marketing messages.

**B. Marketing and Communications**

The Marcom team, while split between two departments, works with a variety of individuals and each other to further the school's marketing and communication goals. The school's visual identity program is strong - from the Instagram boards and interior design of signature spaces to printed materials and signage, a consistent brand image is on display across campus. There also seems to be alignment around RPS' ability to "inspire" its students and "diversity" as one of the school's primary attributes and differentiators.

The Mar/Com team takes an organic approach to content marketing, reflecting the day-to-day rhythm of campus life. In collaboration with the admissions office, they extrapolate ideas for content based on anecdotal interests of parents and staff and craft email campaigns and social media posts. They seek to offer an authentic view into the life of an RPS student, and even invite students to participate in "Instagram takeovers."

The team has identified signature programs and makes an effort to highlight them consistently on the website and social media. Examples include the school-wide Wellness Program, the Academic

Acknowledgement Program, and its globally-focused community and events. In particular, the team has done an excellent job introducing and showcasing the school's unique and passionate approach to DEIB work.

Advancement teams did not articulate an overarching strategic marketing plan or key marketing messages informed by qualitative, quantitative, or market research. Strategy and planning seem to percolate upwards as opposed to thinking broadly about marketing strategies. The school might consider engaging in a research and messaging exercise to support the drafting of a series of key promises that can be made to current and prospective families. Identifying and vetting these messages with key stakeholders (students, faculty, parents, and alumni) will serve to reinforce them internally. It will also then provide a powerful thread of consistent messaging throughout the school's strategic communications, admissions, and fundraising conversations and collateral for years to come. The evidence of distinctive strengths is evident; identifying them, articulating, and emphasizing them, in lieu of an event-based or project-based marketing approach would have significant impact on all advancement initiatives and objectives.

All members of the advancement team acknowledge word-of-mouth as a primary driver for inquiries and applicants. However, they simultaneously assert that internal marketing efforts could be stronger, which are both essential for retention and influencing and magnifying word-of-mouth. The school is encouraged to consider sustained strategies for reinforcing and authenticating a series of key marketing messages amongst current students, faculty, and parents. Your brand evangelists are at the school; organizing and directing their excitement will strengthen their loyalty, extend their reach, and magnify their impact.

The school is commended for its recent effort to increase resources for the marketing and communications team. While none of its members were critical of their structure, they did acknowledge that time is their biggest limiting factor. The school might consider workflow and how the structure might inadvertently dilute clarity of roles, purpose, and collaborations.

**The school is commended for:**

- Visual brand identity.
- Energetic and authentic visual assets and social media content.
- Consistent highlighting of signature programs.
- Geo-targeted ad campaigns based on zip codes of current families.
- Partnering with professionals to conduct a competitor analysis.
- Pivoting to new marketing plans when seeing a trend that could be capitalized on.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Engage in a research and messaging exercise to support the drafting of a series of key promises/messages to support all advancement efforts. Involve key stakeholders in development and roll-out.



- Create an internal and external marketing plan built on a platform of key messages and informed by a strategic communication plan.
- Consider reducing the barrier of inquiry by creating a two-field inquiry form and using it as a pop-up and on campaign landing pages.
- Continue researching inbound/messaging/CRM platforms that will sync effectively.
- Consider clarifying responsibilities and workflow within the Marcom team. For example, does the team know who is directly responsible for identifying strengths and opportunities, creating leads, and converting them.

### **C. Development/Fundraising**

Rutgers Prep's development and alumni efforts are led by a talented, passionate, and experienced group of advancement officers. The team is cohesive, they believe deeply in the mission of their work, and they also understand the importance of being involved in the full life of the school. The department has a natural rapport and it is clear that they support each other as they collectively advance the school's mission.

The past five years have brought exciting changes to the team. Under the leadership of Director of Advancement, they added a Director of Annual Giving position, hired a new Director of Alumni who is also a Rutgers Prep alumna, and recently hired a new Advancement Associate. The department includes a communications function, with both a Director of Digital Communications and a Director of Publications and Photography supporting advancement efforts. Further clarity is needed, however, between the school's communication functions and the school's marketing functions and the role each plays across administrative departments.

The department's charge is clear - continue building an ingrained culture of philanthropy at Rutgers Prep in a way that is both inclusive and that "is never meant to be a burden for any individual or family, but instead should be of an amount that makes the donor feel good about their impact and ensure that their gift is valued." The department acknowledges that alumni and current parent fundraising is a challenge, but positive steps are being made. The school celebrates their "Independence Day " each October 23 with a day of giving, that honors the day the school established its independence from Rutgers University. Using creative and successful tactics, including unlocked videos as goals are hit and matching incentives, the department views past Independence Days as successes while also acknowledging that they are successfully creating a more mainstream culture of philanthropy. The school continues to seek ways to bolster annual giving, including adding leadership and volunteer structures to engage more community members in the process. These efforts are commended.

The school is thoughtful and deliberate with alumni outreach. Cognizant that not all alumni want to attend cocktail receptions or are able to return to campus, they are working to create different opportunities for alumni engagement. The school capitalized on virtual opportunities presented by

COVID to find new and different ways to engage alumni, and those efforts are continuing as they balance in-person opportunities with virtual ones. They have had immediate success with their Express Mentorship Program that connects current juniors with "alumni whose careers align with the students' professional interests."

The school should be proud of its ability to double the percentage of alumni annual fund participation over the past few years, a testament to their growing program. The greater challenge - and perhaps the greatest opportunity - lies in the difficult task of engaging older alumni in the current life of the school and in the school's philanthropic priorities. This challenge cannot be underestimated, and the school needs to consider whether their efforts are better spent solely focused on cultivating current alumni and recent past parents instead of putting too many resources into older, currently dis-engaged alumni.

The school is currently embarking on a capital campaign to support a new building, endowment, and the annual fund. They have a strong case for support and have done a remarkable job cultivating early donors even with the absence of building plans. They also made the commendable and intentional decision to have a comprehensive campaign to ensure inclusivity and a feeling that everyone can play a role in the campaign's success. The hope is that the comprehensive campaign further creates a culture of philanthropy. With a thriving school, happy students, a wonderful and deeply rooted story to tell, and a talented group of advancement professionals, the department is well poised to elevate RPS' philanthropic success. The school's philanthropic future is bright.

**The school is commended for:**

- The department's involvement in the full life of the school, from teaching, coaching, and performing day-to-day responsibilities.
- The growing alumni program, highlighted by the Express Mentorship Program, that has resulted in doubling the percentage of alumni annual fund participation in addition to creating more school loyalty.
- Their early fundraising efforts towards the new, intentionally comprehensive capital campaign and a compelling and strategically rooted case for support.
- The creativity and success of RPS's Independence Day of Giving.
- The success of the Edward E Ford grant and subsequent fundraising match that led to the highly impactful Bloomberg Lab.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Continue efforts to bolster annual giving across all constituencies, using various tactics to garner more support and philanthropic buy-in.
- Weigh and balance the efficacy and opportunity in engaging older generations of RPS alumni.
- Provide further clarity about the school's communication and marketing efforts to ensure

departmental needs are met.

- Continue educating the RPS community about the importance of philanthropy while making their case for an upcoming capital campaign.

## **VI. FINANCE AND OPERATIONS**

### **A. School Finance and Financial Management**

The school's overall financial well-being is overseen by the Board of Trustees, and more specifically the Finance Committee, which provides oversight of the school's finances, audit, and investments. The Chief Operating Office (COO) manages the financial functions at the school and oversees the Director of Finance and Business Office staff, who focus on the daily finance and accounting operations.

The Business Office staff are well qualified and capable. The office has well documented policies and procedures, and is able to meet the internal control and compliance requirements.

The COO has developed an excellent tool for long-range financial planning, which he uses each fall to update the school's long-range financial planning in consultation with the Head of School, the President of the Board, and the Treasurer. Using these high-level assumptions for the upcoming year, and with additional information from budget managers, the Director of Finance develops the budget for the upcoming year with the COO, Head of School, and other school leaders closely involved. The budget is then presented to the Finance Committee by the COO for their review and input and approval, before being presented to the Board for their approval.

In the spring of 2022, the school hired a pension plan investment consultant to act as a co-fiduciary for their 403(b) plan and established a sub-committee of the Finance Committee to oversee the pension plan. In conjunction with the internal controls, and Pinnacle, the outside firm, who conducts the plan testing and prepares the 5500, these measures ensure that the plan is in compliance with all provisions of ERISA.

RPS' finances have been well-managed, and the school has an engaged Finance Committee and Board of Trustees who are conversant with financial oversight and management. In the past 10 years, the school has successfully navigated changes in enrollment, the pandemic, and other uncertainties. In recent years, the school has benefitted from increased enrollment due to the pandemic and has been able to offset a reduction in international students with increased local enrollment, whilst reducing financial aid as a percentage of gross tuition from a high of 25% to 22%.

As a result, Rutgers Prep has a healthy working capital balance of approximately \$7.2 million, a separate capital/PPRSM cash reserve of \$7.5 million and a long-term reserve fund of \$11.4

million, which is invested in index funds. In addition, through contributions and allowing their endowment to grow by not drawing from these funds for a number of years, they have grown both their restricted and quasi-endowments to \$17.4 million. (All values are as of April 2022).

**The school is commended for:**

- Prudent fiscal management, building the school's cash and long-term reserves.
- Developing thorough long-range financial models that can be adapted to study a variety of scenarios.
- Planning for deferred maintenance and adequately funding a reserve for future capital expenditures.
- Retaining a pension plan investment consultant and establishing a sub-committee to oversee the 403(b) plan.
- Recognizing the need to offer a more competitive health insurance package, and actively working addressing this with a multi-year plan to significantly decrease the cost of insurance to employees.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Consider establishing a target range for financial aid that meets the strategic goals of the school and the school believes is financially sustainable.
- Consider expanding the compensation benchmarking beyond the employee benefit package to include faculty salaries (possibly by years of teaching experience), to assess the school's total compensation package compared to RPS's peer schools, and be able to address any deficiencies.
- Ensure the master planning process aligns with the strategic priorities of the school.
- Consider contingencies should there be a decline in the number of international students participating in the homestay program.

**B. Facilities**

RPS is located on a 41-acre campus with 12 buildings, grass and turf fields, baseball and softball fields, five tennis courts, and two playgrounds. The school also owns three residential properties to the north of their campus, two of which were purchased since the last accreditation as part of a strategic objective to expand their campus, which could allow the school to meet any impervious coverage restrictions for construction projects in the future. The campus is located on the Delaware Raritan Canal, which provides a beautiful setting, but also presents challenges, which include severe limitations on impervious coverage, a prohibition on new construction within 100 feet of the canal, and stringent stormwater management requirements.

Over the past 10 years, RPS has completed a number of construction projects and facilities upgrades. These include the opening of the Commons as a classroom facility, replacement of the

turf field, construction of the Ramallo Pavillion, construction of a new Field House entrance, renovation of several classrooms to become life science laboratories, renovation of an existing laboratory. The school has also replaced almost all light bulbs with LED bulbs, and centralized their HVAC controls across their buildings to better manage their energy consumption.

The facilities team consists of the Director of Campus Operations and Information Systems who oversees three supervisors who in turn are responsible for: day-to-day operations, special projects, building and grounds, and collectively oversee nine team members. The Director of Campus Operations also manages a separate custodial staff of 14 people. The school uses a cloud-based work-order system for day-to-day maintenance requests, but can be contacted directly when an urgent matter arises.

Under the leadership of the new COO, RPS has developed a five-year schedule for deferred and on-going maintenance of their facilities, and the Board of Trustees has designated cash reserves to fund this five-year plan and an additional contingency fund. The school reports that the infrastructure (roofs, HVAC, mechanical plant, etc.) is in good condition and well-maintained. The accreditation team noted that the facilities were well cared for.

The school is engaged in a capital campaign to fund new construction that will connect the existing Commons and Music Building, and will provide:

- A new entry for the campus
- A gathering space for performances, school meetings, and events
- Admissions offices
- Flexible classrooms and collaboration spaces.

The school is also about to embark upon a campus master planning process, to assess the longer-term facility needs of the school and how best to address these future needs.

**The school is commended for:**

- Their commitment to an on-going deferred maintenance program and providing adequate funding and cash reserves for this program.
- A highly skilled facilities team, who have been able to carry out many of the school's renovations programs in-house to a very high standard.
- Impactful and practical campus improvements: athletics entryway, rotunda science laboratories, Bloomberg Room, sports field pavilions, etc.
- Embarking upon a master planning process.
- Dining facilities that were well designed, aesthetically pleasing, and student movement that is efficient and well organized.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Proceed with the new building to provide a new entrance, community gathering space, flexible classrooms, and collaboration spaces.

- Renovate the library to create a space that more effectively meets the needs of the programs and students and supports the culture of academic innovation.
- Continue to update and refine their deferred maintenance plan and ensure that the school continues to adequately fund and implement this important on-going maintenance program.
- Continue taking steps to ensure that the performing arts have a dedicated space that is commensurate with the high quality of the program.

### **C. Safety**

The safety of the school is considered a major priority. RPS's Crisis Manual is reviewed and updated annually by the school. The school has a separate transportation policy to ensure that students are transported safely. The school conducts fire and safety drills on a regular basis in accordance with state law.

Senior staff and the Administrative Committee work closely with the Head of School to examine school climate, safety, and wellness. Age-appropriate programming is provided to support student wellness and safety. Employees receive training in SEL and DEIB through the school's partnership with 6 Seconds, and the school's three counseling staff provide support to students on an individual basis. All new employees undergo reference and background checks. All employees receive sexual harassment and professional boundary training every year.

The school employs two retired police officers, who working in two shifts provide a visible security presence on campus throughout the school day and for after school programs. The school has locking mechanisms on all exterior doors. The system is set to lock all exterior doors out of hours. Faculty and staff have fobs that allow them access to the buildings, but students are not issued with fobs, so during the school day, main entrances to the buildings are unlocked, allowing student entry through a prescribed entrance. All other doors were locked during the school day.

Visitors to campus are required to present their identification and are screened through a national database of registered sex offenders. Visitors to campus are required to wear an ID label with their details and photograph.

The Early Childhood Education Center, which houses Pre-K through first grade, does not have any unlocked doors and its location near to the playground facilities ensures that the youngest children on campus were in a safe, age-appropriate location on campus. The Visiting Team also noted that the Lower School Building doors are kept locked through the day (as these children are accompanied when traveling between buildings).

All buildings with AEDs have very clear signage, and the AEDs are clearly visible and accessible. All coaches are trained bi-annually in CPR and first aid, and all employees are provided with a card showing the location of all the AEDs on campus.

The Visiting Team observed both the Lower/Middle School and Upper School carlines, during arrival (7:50 a.m. to 8:20 a.m.) and at regular dismissal (3:00 p.m.). Arrival was orderly and respectful. The culture of the community was reflected in the way that drivers considered others during drop off. Safety personnel were clearly identified and they maintained a calm and professional demeanor while engaging with parents.

The Visiting Team observed an evacuation drill at 10:45 a.m. on Wednesday, October 20. The drill was performed efficiently, with an effective public address system not only providing notification, but additional instructions. Students and employees followed their protocol and evacuated the buildings in an orderly fashion before moving to their evacuation gathering point where attendance was taken for all students and employees. All buildings were swept for any remaining individuals by the two personnel assigned to this task to ensure the buildings were empty.

**The school is commended for:**

- Creating an environment where students and employees feel safe.
- Having an updated and comprehensive Crisis Manual.
- Executing an evacuation drill that was well done.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- In light of recent school security concerns, consider evaluating the following:
  - o Requiring employees and Upper School students to wear ID badges
  - o Improving visitor badge visibility
  - o Revisiting which doors remain open during the school day (front doors with a receptionist could be locked with a buzzer entrance)
  - o If not already installed, installing security film on ground floor windows and doors, and panic buttons at strategic locations.
- Consider the following amendments to their arrival and dismissal car line protocols:
  - o Reminding parents that children should only exit a vehicle curbside and not from the driver's side of a vehicle.
  - o Adding signage to reinforce drop off and pick up rules.
  - o Adding additional personnel to the Lower/Middle School carline to supervise the crossing at the building entrance (the team observed children trying to cross from behind stationary/parked cars with limited visibility), they could also ensure that cars were not parked in the drop off lane, or left idling during both drop-off and pick-up. The current security officer overseeing the carline is primarily focused on the other crossing and managing traffic coming in and out of the area, so is not in a position to oversee this secondary crossing.
  - o At the Upper School carline, the far driving lane at dismissal was used for both moving traffic and for student pick up, thus causing students to enter waiting vehicles through moving traffic. It is suggested that the school leadership design a safer way to organize high school dismissal.

## **D. Record Keeping**

The Self-Study states that security and accessibility are the primary concerns with their wide range keeping methods. All permanent health records are kept in locked cabinets. Current ones are kept in the Health Office and past records are kept in the basement. Personnel records are separated by Employment documents, I-9 documents, and Medical and Benefits documents. All files for active employees are kept in locked cabinets within the HR Office. Records for separated employees are kept in the HR Office for three years before being archived to the Upper School Basement.

Employment files are kept indefinitely. Payroll back up files are kept in the HR Office for three years before being archived in the Upper School basement. These paper records are kept for seven years before being destroyed. Paper records that must be kept in perpetuity are not protected against catastrophic loss.

The school's payroll processing company and Retirement Record Keeper permanently maintain records on all employees on their cloud platforms. The nurses in the Health office are responsible for the maintenance of these permanent records for all students, past and present. Hard copies of these permanent Health records (A-45's) are kept.

All digital records are kept in one of their many databases and all crucial information is kept in either a database or storage drive that is provided by a third party which is responsible for backup and redundancy of the data. There is no data destruction policy by the School or Blackbaud, their primary database company.

### **The school is commended for:**

- Creating a digital system for evaluations and observations.
- Ensuring all federal laws are followed with regards to access and longevity of record.

### **The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Invest in fire-proof file cabinets for essential hard copy records to protect them from catastrophic loss.
- Make a plan to begin digitizing some of the school's archival records in the basement. This could encompass only new records to be archived or begin to expand to some of the records already in the archive. Priority can be given to records that are often needed for reference or that are only moderately restricted.



## **VII. RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS/HOMESTAY PROGRAMS (if applicable)**

RPS partners with Student Room Stay (SRS), a national concierge service that assists students in finding host families and monitoring them throughout their stay. Families using SRS sign a contract provided by them. All host families must be in compliance with the guidelines set by CSIET, and the homestay host agreement. The host families are compensated directly by SRS.

SRS ensures all hosting arrangements are CSIET compliant and is in contact with the RPS International Dean to keep the school aware of any problems that develop.

Currently there are 29 students in the homestay program out of 43 international students attending RPS. All 29 are from China.

At **RPS**, the Dean of International Students oversees the homestay program and is the point person on the school's staff for homestay students, their parents, and host families. The International Dean also has informal check-ins with each individual student regarding their overall situation. The International Dean solicits feedback from students during and at the end of each school year, and often acts on their suggestions. The Dean is helped by one assistant who takes care of the visa and the bureaucratic requirements.

The students are integrated into RPS from the inception of their enrollment, first in Zoom conversations and when they arrive in an orientation session led by the International Dean and veteran international students, in late August before the start of classes. The International Dean ensures their participation in the RPS social life. The older international students take the new students under their wing.

The International students' wellbeing and academic progress are monitored by SRS, the International Dean, and the school counselors. Host families are responsible for students during vacations. The Visiting Team met with three international students. The team was impressed by their courage, candor, and self-awareness. They expressed how well they are supported by their host family, their classmates, and the school.

### **The school is commended for:**

- Integrating the international students in the extracurricular activities and in the social fabric of the school.
- The presence of well-adjusted international students who in and of themselves promote global connections and awareness for all members of the RPS community.
- Having a Dean of International Students to be a liaison with the SRS and monitor the program closely.

**The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Provide an opportunity to Seniors and Juniors to volunteer and actively engage with the international students program.
- Ensure that the staffing is sufficient to support the Dean and the program.

## EXIT REPORT:

On behalf of NJAIS and this Visiting Team, thank you for all of the preparation for our visit with you and the honesty, courtesy, and support that have characterized your engagement with us and our time with you, your students, Trustees, alumni, and parents. At the outset, I have to characterize these exit comments to you as very general and remind you that our visit and the Report of the Visiting Team to come are just two steps in the accreditation process. Our report is in draft form (very drafty at this juncture) and requires some editing and polishing, after which it will go to the NJAIS Director of Accreditation, Lisa Campisi, then to Head of School Steve Loy and then back to NJAIS for any final corrections before being received by the NJAIS Accreditation Committee, which will review, hopefully accept, and then present the report and their recommendation regarding accreditation for Rutgers Prep to the NJAIS Board of Trustees for approval.

I want to thank the Visiting Team members for the extraordinary effort they have made in preparation for this visit and for their efforts and accomplishments over the past four days.

While an intense experience, it has been a jmc to be in your midst and to spend these days at your very happy, compelling, and high-functioning school.

Team member Sally Zeiner from The Willow School left late last night in order to make a 5:30 a.m. departure for Boston so that her daughter, coxswain of her boat, can compete at the Head of the Charles Regatta. Holly Walker, from the Hudson School is on her way to catch a flight to California, but please join me in thanking our other Team members:

- Noga Beer - Red Oaks School
- Kathryn Davison - Montclair Kimberley Academy
- Andy Delinsky - The Peck School
- Mark DiGiacomo - The Pennington School
- Maureen Leming - The Hun School
- Elli Rubin - Rae Kushner Yeshiva High School, Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy

Lisa Campisi, the NJAIS Director of Accreditation is also with us today. I know that those from Rutgers Prep who have relied on Lisa through the self-study process and the planning of our visit, join the Visiting Team in thanking her for her unfailing courtesy, professionalism, and resourcefulness in shepherding the school and the team through the accreditation process. Thank you, Lisa, for all you have done to mentor and support us.

We want to express our deep appreciation to Graig Domanski for his exceptional organization and care for and support of the Team, and our gratitude to Karen De Nise for attending to many details that have allowed us to focus on our work. The risk of expressing gratitude to specific

people is the sin of omission. Every person in the RPS community with whom we have engaged, whether for a quick greeting or a lengthy discussion has been welcoming. People here look the visitor in the eyes and understand the power of acknowledgement.

We also want to thank someone who might be described as your Director of First Impressions, Toni Mazza, for her daily courtesy and thoroughness in checking us in every morning and sending us off in the right direction.

I want to go back to where we began when we first arrived on campus Tuesday afternoon, (which feels like a very long time ago,) to thank those who led the self-study: Steve Loy, Graig Domanski, Nandini Dutta, Teddy Angelos, and Domenica D'Imperio.

And Steve, the Team is deeply grateful for all that you have done to embrace this process and to fully open the doors of a community so clearly precious to you.

In the Self-Study Report, and the scores of documents and materials provided to us regarding all aspects of school operations, resources, policies, and practices, we have had access to extensive amounts of data, policy, and history.

In assessing performance and setting direction, schools are often urged to be "data driven," by experts and consultants, most of whom do not spend their lives in school. "Data informed" is a more useful concept, particularly when balanced with direct observations of daily experience, visible evidence of life in school, and the anecdotes people share that reveal what they most admire and care about. That's the blend we have sought by being with you for the past days: to search for and see the alignment among mission, data, program, daily life, policies, procedures, and your accounts of what it is like to be at Rutgers Prep.

*Through excellence in education, we inspire students to discover and pursue their passions, embrace intellectual curiosity and creativity, and lead with confidence.*

One of the Visiting Team's broadest conclusions from our time with you is that we see you as you see yourselves, as indicated in all of the materials we had access to before and during our visit, particularly in your dedication to fulfill the commitments of your Mission Statement. The alignment among mission, values, actions, and outcomes confirms a high degree of institutional integrity at Rutgers Preparatory School.

From first to last, in every interaction experienced or observed by Visiting Team members, we agree that we have been in a school that does what it says in regard to the commitment of community members to be kind, to be caring, to be responsible, and to be respectful.

There is a very consistent and easy dignity and warmth about the way in which the teaching

faculty interact and connect with students. In the classes we observed, the pace and tone are purposeful, students are engaged with you and with one another, and are clearly glad and grateful to be here.

The Visiting Team believes that the depth of this institutional integrity, the desire and discipline it takes to function as a student-centered school explains the resilience of the school community in the face of the challenges that have come your way in the past 10 years in terms of enrollment fluctuation, the political and social storms within our country to which we must respond as teachers and mentors, the onset of COVID, and the demands of the pandemic in all of the stages in which it has been experienced.

Your school has been and remains a haven and a forge both for colleagues and for students. So, the Visiting Team wishes to acknowledge its admiration for your grit, perseverance, nimbleness, and faithfulness to the school's Mission Statement. Your work over time represents an extraordinary duty of care.

The Report of the Visiting Team includes commendations and recommendations in most areas of school operations. At this juncture, it is appropriate for the Team to share some very broad conclusions with you:

- The positive morale of the professionals in this community is the most powerful and beneficial resource that Rutgers Prep possesses.
- The care given to maintaining the school's buildings and grounds is evidence of a shared respect for the acts of teaching and learning at Rutgers Prep.
- The leadership of Steve Loy is a model for every student and colleague who is or who will find him or herself in a position of responsibility for someone else.
- Your school, as we have reported, is a happy place - but not at all a complacent one: The most evident qualities and conditions that drive your programs should never be taken for granted and will always require intentional cultivation: innovation, which is a form of risk-taking, depends on trust, nimbleness flows from ongoing reflection and the courage to change and commit, the freedom to be creative flourishes easily in an environment of collaboration and respect - all of these actions and conditions are present here.
- A school consultant who may be known to you, Kevin Graham, who specializes in very complex and detailed survey work and analysis of faculty, student, and parent satisfaction with their independent school experience, has accumulated overwhelming evidence that the most high functioning schools, in terms of satisfaction levels from all constituents, are ones in which there are multiple opportunities for older students to mentor younger

students. The relationships that arise are among the most positive and formative that students have in the schools that build such experiences into daily life. Rutgers Prep has already established this practice - we urge you to stay on and broaden that path.

- The lived values of the Rutgers Prep Mission Statement are in abundant evidence in program and daily life, yet the statement itself is not. The Team believes that your care for the Mission and your sharing of it with members of the community and visitors to the school would be reinforced if the statement itself or elements of it was present in every classroom and public space.

I apologize for the homely analogy that is about to follow - it was late when I was distilling the Visiting Team's insights and input:

- Every professional's commitment to communicating with those around them within a PreK-12 school greases the wheels of excellence. The Visiting Team encourages you to keep building lines and habits of communication that heighten awareness of what is happening in the here and now and what is underway for the future.

Much of your professional efforts and intentions appear to center on what you can do to inspire your students and one another. I suspect you are all familiar with a quote from Thomas Edison that: *"Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration."*

A commitment to inspiring others to find their passions is also 99% perspiration, requiring a bundling of just about every lived value and habit of mind that teaching and working at RPS requires.

I did not have as much scheduled time with students as I now wish that I did. Yesterday, Noga Beer and I met with three of the international students who are here from China. Tim Cohen, Meredith Santowasso, and Kevin Merges were also present. At first, conversation was slow, but then the commitment and courage of the three students became evident as they talked about why they had chosen to study abroad, to come to Rutgers Prep, to be part of programs such as music and theater and athletics that would never have been a component of their lives in school back home, and each child's keen academic passions were revealed as well. For me and for Noga, this was one of the most moving experiences of our time at Rutgers Prep.

The Visiting Team is in awe of the degree to which this is occurring here and we hope that our full report to you will contribute to the evolution and the longevity of the school's strength and success. Thank you.

## **MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Major Commendations**

#### **The school is commended for:**

- Faithfulness to its Mission while cultivating an academic and programmatic culture of innovation and creativity.
- A rigorous focus on what is best for its students and most recently in maintaining that duty of care throughout the pandemic.
- Engaging in the essential and challenging work associated with diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging within the RPS community from a first principle of assuring the social and emotional well-being of all students and colleagues.
- Developing and offering academic and co-curricular programs that are inclusive and have the capacity to inspire excellence in student performance and accomplishment.
- An ongoing commitment to provide facilities of a quality and versatility that are a physical manifestation of respect for teachers and learners.
- Cultivating the strong and positive professional morale of the faculty through a balanced culture of autonomy and accountability.
- Providing myriad opportunities for leadership to students and colleagues that promote personal, intellectual and professional growth.

### **Major Recommendations**

#### **The Visiting Team recommends that the school:**

- Make the words of the Mission Statement more visible for colleagues, students, alumni, parents, and visitors.
- Review and if necessary, update the financial aid philosophy and policy and evaluate the sustainability of current financial aid allocation.
- Undertake an 'internal communications assessment' to develop a precise understanding of when and where information, planning, or decision-making need to be more broadly known and understood among colleagues.
- Consider a redesign of the library space that encourages a greater range of academic and community activity.
- Continue to vest the administrative leaders of the school, such as in finance, advancement, athletics, curriculum and program with the explicit responsibility of looking to and planning for the future of Rutgers Preparatory School in order to best advise the Head of School and guide their departments.
- Complete and optimize the campus design with a community space for performances, student and faculty gatherings, and the capacity to serve the school's future needs.

## **NJAIS STANDARDS for ACCREDITATION**

The NJAIS Standards consist of these major sections:

- I. Mission/Philosophy
- II. Institutional Leadership
- III. Educational Program
- IV. Technology
- V. Advancement
- VI. Finance and Operations
- VII. Residential Schools/ Homestay Programs (if applicable)
- VIII. Schools Affiliated with Religious Organizations/Faith-Based Institutions (if applicable)

### **I MISSION/PHILOSOPHY**

#### **A. Mission/Philosophy**

- 1. The school has a clearly stated mission/philosophy statement that is reviewed periodically and approved by the Board of Trustees.

**Standard Met**

- 2. The mission/philosophy informs school decisions and programs.

**Standard Met**

- 3. The school communicates its mission/philosophy to all constituents.

**Standard Met**

#### **B. School Climate and Culture**

- 4. The climate and culture of the school reflect the school's mission/philosophy.

**Standard Met**



### **C. Community Relations**

5. The school strives to maintain good relationships with the community in which it is located.

**Standard Met**

### **D. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging**

6. In keeping with its mission/philosophy, the school promotes an equitable, just, and inclusive community that inspires students to respect others and value diversity.

**Standard Met**

### **E. Global Awareness**

7. The school strives to promote a culture of global understanding that is appropriate to the school's mission, size, and means.

**Standard Met**

### **F. Environmental Stewardship**

8. The school strives to promote a commitment to environmental responsibility and stewardship for current and future generations.

**Standard Met**

## **II. INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

### **A. Governance**

9. The school is incorporated as a non-profit organization and has been granted by the Internal Revenue Service 501(c)3 status or an equivalent form of tax-exempt status.

**Standard Met**

10. The school and its governance structure are organized with appropriate independence from other organizations or individuals as to ensure its ability to fulfill its mission and plan for its future.

**Standard Met**

11. The Board reviews and maintains Bylaws and keeps minutes of meetings that conform to laws and regulations.

**Standard Met**

12. The Board develops and regularly reviews Board written policies in a Policy Manual.

**Standard Met**

13. The Board has sole fiduciary responsibility for the school and ensures that adequate financial resources and facilities are provided for the institution.

**Standard Met**

14. The Board has appropriate policies and procedures to support the creation, review, and approval of an annual operating and capital budget, as well as short and long-range financial plans.

**Standard Met with Comment: Review and if necessary, update the financial aid philosophy and policy and evaluate the sustainability of current financial aid allocation.**

15. The Board engages in regular strategic planning and documents in writing the elements of that plan.

**Standard Met**

16. The Board understands its central role in development/institutional advancement and actively supports these efforts.

**Standard Met**

17. The Board demonstrates effective boundaries between the policy-making role of the Board and the role of the Head of School as educational leader and manager of school day-to-day operations.

**Standard Met**

18. The Board provides a written contract for the Head of School that sets forth major responsibilities, a mutually agreed upon plan of evaluation of the Head, compensation and benefits, the term of employment, a required termination notice, and ensures the Head's right to address the Board with regard to situations in which the Head's position might be at risk.

**Standard Met**

19. The Board ensures stability in transitions of Head and Board leadership and provides transition planning.

**Standard Met**

20. The Board has an effective process to identify, cultivate, and select new members to its Board.

**Standard Met**

21. The school provides for the orientation of new trustees and requires ongoing professional development for the Board of Trustees as a whole.

**Standard Met**

22. The Board has a regular, clearly defined, and well-administered program of annual evaluation for itself as an entity and for individual Board members.

**Standard Met with Comment: In addition to its annual evaluation of the Head of School, the Board of Trustees evaluates itself as a whole. In order to satisfy this standard, Head of School, Steve Loy, proposed to the Team Chair and Vice Chair that an individual Trustee evaluation instrument would be developed and in place for the 2022-23 school year.**

23. The Board reviews annually and members sign individually a conflict of interest and confidentiality statement.

**Standard Met with Comment: Ensure that each Board member completes a yearly confidentiality statement in addition to the conflict of interest statement.**

24. The Board ensures that the school has adequate provision for risk assessment, mitigation, and management, including regular review of best risk mitigation practices and the transfer of liability, property, and casualty risk through appropriate insurance.

**Standard Met**

25. The Board carries Directors' and Officers' insurance and annually reviews the policy.

**Standard Met**

## **B. Administration**

26. The administration is organized in a manner that enables it to carry out the mission/philosophy of the school.

**Standard Met**

27. Faculty, administration, and staff members are sufficient in number to accomplish the work for which they are responsible.

**Standard Met**

28. The school provides ongoing opportunities for professional growth.

**Standard Met**

29. The school has a clearly defined and well-administered process for supervision and evaluation of faculty, administration, and staff.

**Standard Met**

30. There are clearly articulated channels by which members of all constituency groups (including faculty, parents, students, alumnae/i) can communicate meaningfully with school administrators.

**Standard Met**

## **C. Human Resources**

31. The Head of School determines that all the members of the faculty, administration, and staff are qualified for their positions and responsibilities, and are committed to the mission/philosophy of the school.

**Standard Met**

32. The school conducts pre-employment fingerprint clearance and comprehensive background checks on all employees, volunteers, and vendors who are in a position to have unaccompanied, routine contact with students.

**Standard met with comment: The dining services provider, SAGE, does not conduct pre-employment fingerprint clearance, although they do perform a background check for their employees. The school will require that SAGE obtain fingerprinting and this clearance for SAGE employees on RPS's campus.**

33. Personnel practices provide ethical treatment among all faculty, administrators, and staff with respect to compensation, workloads, and working conditions.

**Standard Met**

### **III. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM**

#### **1. Curriculum and Instruction**

34. All school programs (including early childhood, residential (boarding and homestay), extended care, online, etc.) stem from the school's beliefs about teaching and learning, are consistent with the mission/philosophy of the school, and are reviewed regularly.

**Standard Met**

35. Congruent with the school's mission/philosophy, the school's programs demonstrate consideration for intellectual, social, physical, aesthetic, and ethical education of students. The program encourages freedom of inquiry, respects diversity of viewpoints, and promotes critical thinking.

**Standard Met**

36. The school demonstrates responsible and ongoing understanding of current educational research and best practices consistent with its mission.

**Standard Met**

37. The school provides evidence of a thoughtful process, respectful of its mission, for the collection and use in school decision-making of data (internal and external) about student learning, for both current and past students.

**Standard Met**

38. The school has a clear process for evaluating individual student progress and reporting to parents or guardians on a periodic basis.

**Standard Met**

## **2. Remote Instruction**

39. The school's remote instruction stems from the school's beliefs about teaching and learning, is consistent with the mission/philosophy of the school, and is reviewed regularly.

**Standard Met**

## **3. Support Services: Learning Support, Counseling, Advising, Health, and Wellness**

40. Consistent with its mission/philosophy, the school's program has sufficient range for the learning styles, developmental needs, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the students enrolled in the school.

**Standard Met**

41. The school provides advisory, guidance, and counseling services to its students that are consistent with its mission/philosophy, either directly or through referral.

**Standard Met**

42. The school provides appropriate health services for students and employees that are administered and carried out by personnel who have appropriate training and experience.

**Standard Met**

43. The school has a process to ensure that it demonstrates compliance with all statutory regulations.

**Standard Met**

## **4. Discipline**

44. Discipline practices are humane and mindful of the inherent dignity in every student. Corporal punishment is not an acceptable practice.

**Standard Met**

## **5. Secondary School and College and Career Counseling**

45. The school has in place a procedure for follow-up on graduate success, and utilizes resulting data to assess its goals and programs.

**Standard Met**

## **6. Co-Curricular Activities and Athletics**

46. The co-curricular activities reflect the mission/philosophy of the school.

**Standard Met**

#### **IV. TECHNOLOGY**

47. The school has an effective information technology program that addresses communication, administration, and instruction.

**Standard Met**

#### **V. ADVANCEMENT**

##### **A. Enrollment Management: Admissions, Retention, and Financial Aid**

48. The school's admissions policies and procedures both reflect and enhance the school's mission.

**Standard Met**

49. The school invests adequate institutional resources in its efforts to promote parent satisfaction and support robust student retention.

**Standard Met**

50. The school's financial aid program both reflects and enhances the school's mission.

**Standard Met**

##### **B. Marketing and Communications**

51. The school's marketing and communications plans serve to strengthen the school's reputation both internally and in the broader community.

**Standard Met**

52. The school employs methods of communicating with its stakeholders that are appropriate to the school's mission, size, and means.

**Standard Met**

### **C. Development/Fundraising**

53. The school's development efforts are well coordinated, congruent with the school's mission/philosophy, and adequately support the current and future needs of the school.

**Standard Met**

54. The school engages key constituents including parents, alumni, and other members of the community in advancement activities congruent with its mission/philosophy

**Standard Met**

## **VI. FINANCE AND OPERATIONS**

### **A. School Finance and Financial Management**

55. The school has sufficient resources to meet its financial needs.

**Standard Met**

56. The school has appropriate policies and procedures for managing the financial resources of the school.

**Standard Met**

57. The financial responsibilities of parents/guardians are stated and published.

**Standard Met**

### **B. Facilities**

58. The school's facilities and grounds are adequate to support its mission and program and are responsibly maintained.

**Standard Met**

### **C. Safety**

59. The school is safe, healthy, and secure for all members of the school community. Effective and well-established policies and procedures exist and are acted upon to protect children and adults alike.

**Standard Met**



60. Preventative and emergency health, safety, and security procedures are clear and well documented, and include a crisis management plan for both on and off-campus activities.

**Standard Met**

#### **D. Record Keeping**

61. The school has policies and procedures that govern the retention, maintenance, and use of personnel, financial, corporate, legal, health and safety, and student records, including print and digital records. All records are protected against catastrophic loss and are available only to authorized personnel.

**Standard Met with Comment: Based on their mission critical value, undertake the prioritization of records that are not protected against catastrophic loss and determine a process and commit to a timeline for securing those records.**

#### **VII. RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS/ HOMESTAY PROGRAMS (if applicable)**

Note: Residential schools refer to boarding schools. Homestay students refer to enrolled students who reside off campus with host families, not with parents or other relatives or legal guardians, regardless of whether they are placed by an agency or not.

62. The school's residential/homestay programs reflect and enhance the school's mission, provide a rich experience for students, and are integrated into the life of the school community as a whole.

**Standard Met**

63. The school's residential/homestay programs are staffed appropriately, particularly with respect to the portion of the day outside regular classroom hours, including evening, weekend, and vacation activities. Health, safety, and communication with parents are under the purview of the school.

**Standard Met**

64. The school provides for the particular needs of its international students.

**Standard Met**

**VIII. SCHOOLS AFFILIATED WITH RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS/FAITH- BASED INSTITUTIONS**

65. The independent religiously-affiliated/faith-based school provides in its Bylaws a clear statement of its religious identity.

NA

66. A clearly stated policy, outlining the relationship of the school to its sponsoring organization and the responsibilities of each, is included in the school's Bylaws and/or policy handbook.

NA

67. There shall be a provision in the school's Bylaws for a Board of Trustees that shall be elected according to the guidelines established by the governing body of the affiliated religious organization/faith-based institution and in agreement with the school. Any nominee to the school's Board of Trustees from the affiliated religious organization/faith-based institution must meet the standards of membership for Trustees and go through the same vetting, nominating, election, and orientation process as all other Board members.

NA

68. The school has a clearly articulated statement of its religious goals, and these are reflected in its policies, practices, and school culture and are communicated to all constituents.

NA