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A Conversation  
About **Taft's**  
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# Strategic Design Plan



The *Taft Bulletin* recently sat down with Head of School **Peter Becker '95** and faculty members **Eileen Fenn Bouffard '98** and **Ozzie Parente**, who are co-chairing the implementation of the Strategic Design Plan, to learn more about how and why the plan came to be and to hear about next steps.



**Taft Bulletin**  
**What is a strategic design plan, and why is Taft undertaking this work now?**

**Becker**

At its heart, a strategic design plan is a roadmap for the future. It helps us articulate who we are, what we value, and where we want to go as a school. Taft is in a strong position—we have exceptional students, dedicated faculty and staff, supportive

families, and loyal alumni. But education is evolving rapidly. The skills students need to thrive in college, in careers, and in life look different than they did even a decade ago. This plan is about making sure Taft not only adapts to those changes but leads with clarity and purpose. Now is the right moment to take stock, to ask bold questions, and to ensure that our mission and values remain relevant and powerful for the generation ahead.

**BULLETIN**  
**What makes this process different from a traditional strategic plan?**

**Becker**

A traditional plan often feels static—it lays out a list of goals, tasks, and timelines. But schools, like the world, don't stand still. We wanted something more dynamic. Strategic design emphasizes both vision and flexibility. It's about designing for the future in ways that honor our timeless values but also allow us to pivot when new opportunities and challenges arise.

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**Strategic Design Plan**

**BULLETIN**  
**Who has been involved in creating the plan?**

**Bouffard**

This has truly been a community-wide effort. We began with a committee made up of faculty, trustees, alumni, and outside experts in education. They have been instrumental in shaping the process. We've also conducted surveys, hosted focus groups, and had countless one-on-one conversations. We wanted to hear from everyone who cares deeply about Taft, including current students. That breadth of input has been invaluable—it's helped us see where there's strong alignment and where we need to think more carefully about trade-offs or competing priorities.

**BULLETIN**  
**What are some of the central themes that have emerged?**

**Parente**

While the plan will speak to many areas of school life, a few key themes have risen to the top. First, we remain deeply committed to academic excellence—helping students become not just knowledgeable but also adaptable, creative, and ethical thinkers. Second, we've heard again and again about the importance of community and belonging. Families, alumni, and students alike value the sense of connection at Taft, and we want to strengthen that even further. Third, we've talked a lot about preparing students for purposeful lives—lives of service, leadership, and meaning. Those threads run throughout the design.

The strength and utility of the Portrait of a Learner lie in its applicability to every facet of life at Taft. Whether in the classroom, on the athletic field, in the dormitory, or during advisory, the goals we've outlined in the Portrait of a Learner are always relevant and always at work. That's one of Taft's greatest advantages—our mission and values aren't confined to a single space or moment; they shape the entire student experience.

**Portrait of a Learner (POL)**

*Taft graduates will...*

- > **Strive for Wisdom**
- > **Find Joy in Purpose**
- > **Nurture Relationships**
- > **Build Resilience**
- > **Practice Humility**
- > **Pursue Excellence**
- > **Live with Honor**



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**BULLETIN**  
**Can you walk us through the process itself? How did you go from big questions to a coherent plan?**

## Bouffard

We started with discovery—listening to as many voices as possible and collecting data. From there, we identified patterns and themes. Then came design workshops where we refined those ideas into more concrete priorities. What was important in this stage was balancing aspiration with pragmatism—pushing ourselves to think big, but also grounding the work in Taft’s mission and our actual capacity. Once we had draft priorities, we tested them with different groups, refined them further, and eventually arrived at the version we’ve shared with the community.

**BULLETIN**  
**Why is a process like this so important for a school with Taft’s history and strength?**

## Becker

One of the things I love most about Taft is the strength of our traditions—our values, our community spirit, our motto: *Not to be served but to serve*. Those have endured for generations and will continue to guide us. At the same time, resting on tradition alone isn’t enough. We need to make sure that the experience we’re offering today’s students—and tomorrow’s—is as relevant and transformative as it has always been. Strategic design allows us to bridge the timeless with the timely. It helps us steward Taft’s legacy while ensuring we remain innovative, inclusive, and forward-looking.



## Taft’s Core Values

*These five core values reflect what we believe matters most—today and in the future. They guide our decisions, shape our programs, and inspire our community. We honor our past and build our future grounded in these values.*

- > **Learn Deeply**
- > **Build Purpose**
- > **Serve Generously**
- > **Pursue Excellence**
- > **Lead with Courage**



**BULLETIN**  
**How does this plan connect to Taft’s mission?**

## Becker

The mission is the North Star. Everything we do has to flow from it. The plan doesn’t replace our mission—it amplifies it. It asks: How do we live into our mission more fully in today’s context? How do we make sure every student, in every corner of campus, feels the power of Taft’s commitment to academic rigor, character, and service? The plan provides a framework for answering those questions.

**BULLETIN**  
**When will the plan be operationalized? How will the community see it in action?**

## Bouffard

The plan is already living in the work we do every day—new initiatives, enhancements to programs, and ongoing reflection on how well we’re meeting our goals. Implementation isn’t a one-time rollout; it’s a continuous process of aligning our choices and resources with the design we’ve set forth. For example, this fall we changed our onboarding for all students—bringing the whole community back on one day and having very structured, purposeful community-building activities for a week before classes began in earnest. This meant that new students were welcomed with practical knowledge (tours of campus, IT orientation sessions, dorm meetings to set expectations) and community-building activities (lunches by advisory and dorm, class-specific outings, color team activities).

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**BULLETIN**  
**Looking ahead, what do you  
hope this plan accomplishes?**

**Parente**

We hope it provides clarity, inspiration, and direction. We hope it strengthens our sense of shared purpose across students, faculty, staff, families, and alumni. And we hope it helps us continue to be a school where students not only achieve at the highest levels but also discover who they are, what they care about, and how they can make a difference in the world.



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**Becker**

The values we hope to instill—wisdom, purpose, resilience, relationships, excellence, humility, and honor—are increasingly at odds with the forces shaping young people beyond our walls. There’s no single culprit, but the pace and pressures of modern life often train habits of attention and ways of being that erode our students’ deepest human capacities and their potential for meaningful, purposeful lives. We can’t change those forces on a global scale—but we *can* make a profound difference here by creating an environment that is intentionally designed to nurture their growth. That happens in classrooms and dormitories, on fields and stages, and in small groups and one-on-one moments with trusted teachers. Often a single conversation or experience moves a student a step closer to wisdom, resilience, or honor. That’s why we’re here—and that’s what makes this work so essential.

**BULLETIN**  
**How can Taft parents and alumni help?**

**Becker**

First, stay engaged: ask questions, learn about what’s happening, and connect with the great work underway by reading this magazine, opening our emails, and following Taft on social media. Second, remember that a school like Taft simply doesn’t exist without the generosity of its community—alumni, parents, past parents, and grandparents. Our success depends not only on the hard work of many but also on the philanthropic support that sustains and strengthens Taft for the future. ■

> Scan QR code to learn more about the Strategic Design Plan.



**Strategic Design Team**

*The strategic design process was led by a Strategic Design Team composed of Taft constituents in partnership with Greenwich Leadership Partners. Their charge was to articulate a vision and strategy for Taft that clarifies the school’s identity and value proposition, focuses the school’s work, and drives implementation planning and decision-making over the next three to five years. The team included:*

- > **Emily Bakemeier**, Vice Provost for Arts and Faculty Affairs, Yale University
- > **Peter Becker '95**, Head of School, The Taft School
- > **Eileen Fenn Bouffard '98**, Director of Teaching and Learning, English Department Head, The Taft School
- > **Justin Hudak**, Dean of the Lower Mid Class, Latin and English, The Taft School
- > **Michael Humphreys '93**, Taft Trustee; Teacher, Harlem Renaissance High School
- > **Christian Jensen '01**, Partner and Co-Head of Private Investments, Dragoneer Investment Group
- > **Paul Klingenstein '74**, Former Taft Trustee; Founder, Aberdare Ventures
- > **Gina Ludlow**, Director of Learning Services, The Taft School
- > **Amanda Costanzo McGovern '93**, Taft Trustee; Cofounder, Seas It; Development and Communications Manager, The Sconset Trust
- > **Ozzie Parente**, Associate Dean of Students, Chemistry, The Taft School
- > **Brynne McNulty Rojas '06**, Cofounder and CEO, Habi
- > **Launa Schweitzer**, Head of School, Washington Montessori School