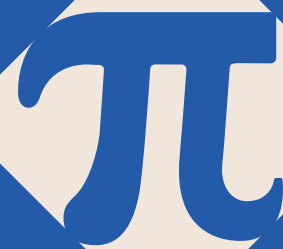


PAIDEIA

Our School
Our Community
Our Place

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

OCTOBER 2026



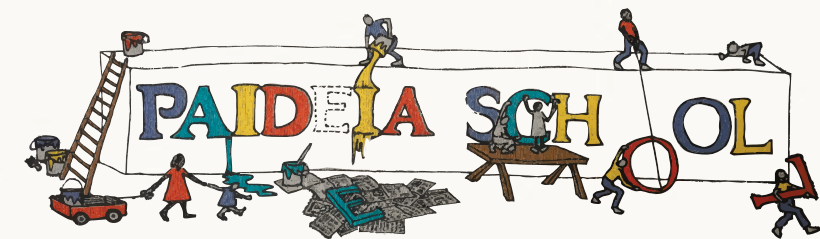
DEAR PYTHONS

In the late 1990s, Paideia student Moses Rifkin '97 wrote our school song, *O Mascot of Might*. Like many things at Paideia, it is humorously self-referential, a little silly, and full of joy. It was also remarkably prescient. The opening lines of our song are:

*Let's remember that September
When our school was new.*

*Parents willed it, teachers built it,
And we're still not through.*

Even earlier, in 1991 as the school celebrated its 20th Anniversary, a commemorative t-shirt was made. "Paideia School: A Work in Progress" is what it read.



A Work in Progress 1971-1991

As a school, one of our most defining characteristics has always been a desire to be self-reflective, to see the ways in which we can keep growing, evolving and improving. This is part of what it means to be a progressive school. And this has been true, not only in how we refer to ourselves, but also in the work we've done. Paul Bianchi, our founding head of school, often engaged in long-range planning exercises with the board and key administrators, asking themselves, "How can we improve?"

Within these pages you'll find the culmination of over twelve months of the collaborative, engaging, and sometimes challenging work done by a wide cross-section of our community: Our Strategic Focus Areas and Priorities.

These goals form the basis of what will become our strategic plan, a roadmap for the work that will guide our school as we continue to become the best version of ourselves. I am deeply grateful to our Board of Trustees, who worked alongside school leadership at every stage of this process, adopted these Focus Areas and Priorities last spring, and will oversee implementation. I look forward to partnering with all of you as we do this work, to preserve the core of who we are as a school, while also recognizing that, as our school song states, "we're still not through."

I suspect we'll never be through. As human-filled organizations dedicated to the growth and development of young people, schools – like the children we serve – are never finished products. We are, each of us, in the process of becoming ourselves and Paideia is no different. Leading our school in the company of a caring, committed community is the privilege of a lifetime.

Onward,

Tom



Our Approach

Paideia's strength derives from the kind of school we are. As a core part of our approach, we believe that educating children is a communal endeavor. The word "Paideia" encompasses the idea of a total and complete education, one that is deeper than the mere transmission of information. Education is a lifelong process, not simply a means to an end. At its core, Paideia represents a *community coming together to raise and educate our children.*

Our community is guided by an aspirational set of principles, our Framework of Values. Since its drafting in 1979, our Framework of Values has reminded us that the role of educators encompasses far more than teaching academic subjects alone. As teachers, we hope to model a greater understanding of our place in the world beyond South Ponce, how we treat one another—our classmates, family and friends, strangers we've not met—and what it means to be a student both in and out of the classroom. The Framework helps us prepare our students to not only live in the world, but to change it. And importantly, we try to do this all with a sense of humor, recognizing that while we do serious work, we don't need to take ourselves too seriously.

Framework of Values

EGALITARIANISM

The school should use every opportunity to stress equality among races, among ethnic groups and between the sexes. Sexism and racism are still powerful forces in our society and unless the school addresses these issues actively and continually, children may absorb negative values from the surrounding culture. Much of teaching needs to be by example and through practice.

EXCELLENCE AND HARD WORK

Paideia should be a school that values excellence. We ought to encourage our children to do their best in all or most of what they try. As well as excellence in basic academic areas, we should emphasize quality work in the arts, in athletics and in leadership. Not all children are capable of excellence in all or even most of these areas. We should also stress the value of effort and the satisfaction and rewards that come with hard work. Paideia should also emphasize creative expression and problem solving that go beyond established bodies of knowledge. An emphasis on innovation is necessary if students are going to learn to adapt to a changing world and ultimately take part in shaping change.



RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY

Paideia should teach explicitly, by example, and through its environment an appreciation of racial, ethnic and cultural diversity.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEARNING

Paideia should teach that learning is a lifelong process, not only an activity associated with institutions, and that individuals are responsible for their own learning. Most schools promote the passive acquisition of knowledge. We should teach our students to use reason and logic and to apply these tools to engage with the world. Schools often err on the side of stressing the competitive and private nature of learning. We should impart the value that learning can often be a cooperative effort in which shared ideas enhance each student's experience and understanding.



Framework of Values

CONT'D

EMPATHY

Our students should be encouraged to develop a caring and respectful attitude toward children and adults in their community. We live in a culture that stresses individual self-fulfillment, sometimes at the expense of others. Perceiving the needs and caring about the welfare of others is fundamental to becoming a mature person.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Our students should understand the opportunities they have been given by their parents, their community and their school, and that there exists the expectation that they will respond by leading socially useful and purposeful lives. Social responsibility encompasses compassion for others, responsibility for working on solutions to the problems of our immediate community and of the larger national and international community. Awareness of these problems comes through study and through informed activity. Social responsibility in our society also involves an understanding of democratic values, the structure of our political community and the nature of leadership in a democratic society.

DEVELOPMENT OF AN ETHICAL SELF

Students should begin to define their own values as part of a developing sense of personal identity. They should be able to be honest about their convictions and have the courage to defend them. It is particularly difficult for children to maintain their personal integrity in the face of social pressures. They must also grapple with the persistent ambiguity of many ethical issues. The school should provide opportunities for students to test and expand their ethical awareness.

By focusing on people and values at Paideia, every day is a joyful expression of the myriad ways we teach, learn, and grow together.

COMMITMENT TO AN ENVIRONMENTAL VIEW

The school should introduce children to the complex interrelatedness of people and the environment. We should encourage our students to take responsibility for their own immediate environment and for advocating preservation and protection of the natural world.

AN APPRECIATION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRESENT

Schools as preparatory institutions are almost always guilty of overemphasizing the future: everything that happens is rationalized for its future benefits. Education is not only preparation for life; it is life. That consciousness ought to be present at Paideia. The day a child spends now in school is as valuable as what will come later. Respecting the value of the present is one way of preparing for a healthy and productive future.



A Progressive School

We remain committed to the principles of progressive education, which for Paideia, can be summarized in three ways:

1 OUR PERSPECTIVE ON CHILDREN.

Paideia believes strongly that children are not empty vessels, waiting to be filled with knowledge. Rather, Paideia students come to us as whole humans, worthy of our care and respect. Our job as educators, then, is to create and sustain an environment that supports them—as individuals—as they learn, grow, and develop.

2 OUR PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATION.

One goal of a progressive education is to encourage our students to see and act on ways to improve the world. For us, education promotes change and affirms the humanity and worth of every human being. This belief is what drives our deep and abiding commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB), our value for environmental sustainability, and our sense of social responsibility.

3 OUR PERSPECTIVE ON OUR SCHOOL.

As a school we strive to maintain a stance of institutional self-reflection and continuous improvement. Our default position ought to be one in which we evaluate what we do and why we do it on an ongoing basis. Unwilling to accept “that’s the way it’s always been,” we can ask “why?” While change for change’s sake is the stuff of educational trends and fads, a willingness to be self-critical and to change course as needed is a vital part of being a progressive school.



Building on a Strong Foundation

Since our founding in 1971, Paideia has grown into one of the leading schools in Atlanta: a school of choice for many families. The foundation built by Paul Bianchi, Barbara Dunbar, faculty & staff, and the school's boards over the first 52 years ensured that Paideia thrived through its first head of school transition. Now, we stand ready to articulate an exciting vision for the future of our school, one that does not seek to change who we are or what we do, nor to “fix” any component of our work. Rather, we are eager to continue to evolve (as we always have), striving toward a better version of ourselves.

Paideia currently enjoys a strong enrollment landscape, is financially healthy, fosters strong philanthropic commitment from our community, and consistently retains well over 95% of our families and our faculty and staff. This strong foundation affords us the opportunity to dream about our future with optimism and excitement rather than focusing on merely surviving.

The Board and Tom understood that Paideia has been built on a strong foundation of trust, care, and investment from the whole community. On the heels of COVID; a nation-wide racial reckoning in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and others; the Black@ social media movement; and a Head of School transition, we felt this was a moment to re-commit to that spirit of trust and partnership to clearly define our path forward.

Often after extolling the school's strengths, Paul Bianchi would say, “But, we’re not perfect. No school is.” This grounding statement helps us remember that for all our strengths, **Paideia is a school that is constantly evolving, always looking to bring our work more closely into alignment with who we know we are, and who we want to be.**

OVER
95%
RETENTION
of our families
and our faculty
and staff



A Deep and Inclusive Process

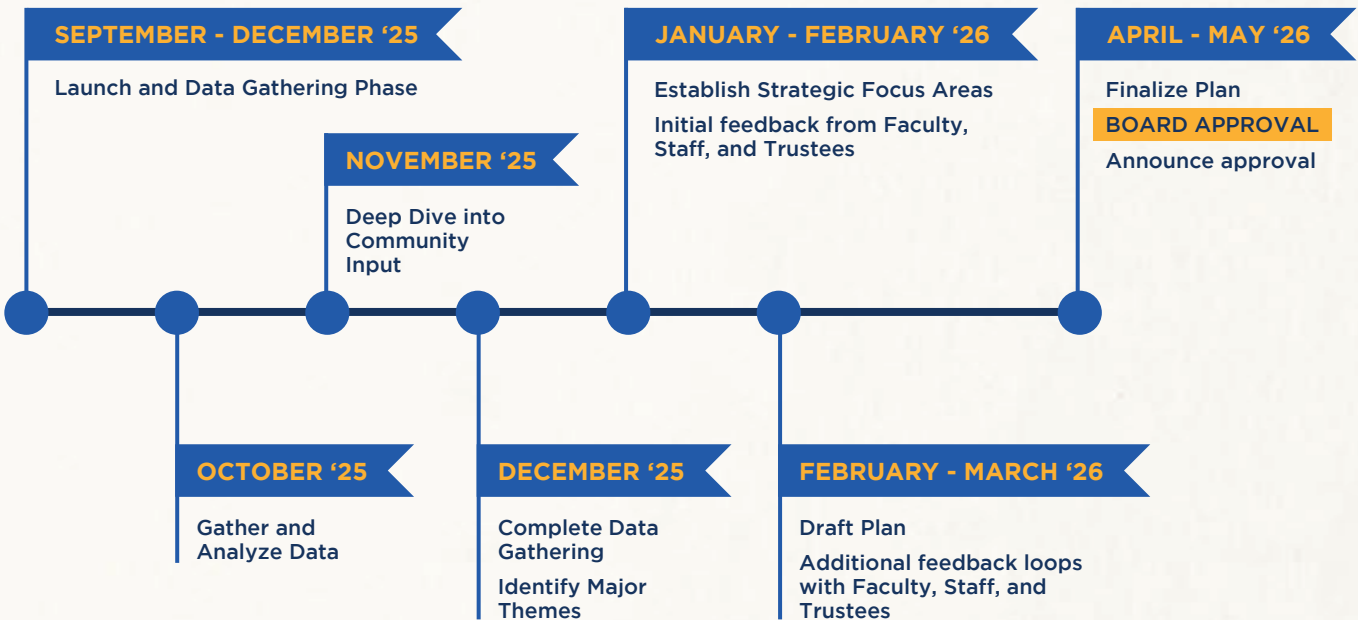
The process of developing our strategic plan has been intentionally inclusive and broad-based, designed so that every member of the community had an opportunity to add their voice.

In the summer of 2025, the school hired Mission & Data, a consulting firm specializing in strategic planning for independent schools. With their guidance, we recruited a group of community members—teachers, administrators, board trustees, and parents—who formed our Strategic Planning Committee. Throughout this process, the Board of Trustees offered critically important feedback, guidance, oversight, and support.

Strategic Planning Committee

John Bencich	Raymond Lam
Justin Carr '95 <i>Chair</i>	Lionel Legagneur
Anthony Clark	Cortney Lollar '93
Kristen Davis	Laura Magnanini
Elise Eplan '78	Danielle Joiner McPherson
Sameera Fazili	Joy Lewis-Mendez
Cara Frattasi	Tiffany Nelson
Jorge Fuenzalida	Thad Sheely
Sonya Ko	Tom Taylor

Phase One Process and Timeline



How Did We Do the Work?

A key priority of the Board and Strategic Planning Committee was to ensure our strategic direction was grounded in the lived experiences of our community. So before any strategizing, deciding, or prioritizing, with the help of our consultants, we listened. We invited students, families, alumni, faculty, and staff to share their perspectives through community-wide surveys and a series of focus groups.

The surveys provided important insight into overall sentiment, while the focus groups added essential texture to that data and helped us capture the nuances of life at Paideia in a fuller way. The insights we gathered from this process directly informed and validated the three strategic focus areas we ultimately named.

- 9** Strategic Planning Task Force Meetings (with homework!)
- 1** Board-Leadership Team Strategic Planning Retreat
- 1** Faculty/Staff Kickoff Meeting
- 2** Community-wide Surveys
- 6** Student, Faculty and Staff Focus Groups
- 6** Parent Focus Groups
- 5** Small Group Writing Sessions
- 4** Faculty and Staff Feedback Sessions on Goals Statements

With this store of data in hand, the Strategic Planning Committee looked for trends to distill this information into themes—narrowing down areas of potential strategic focus. Through many rounds of revision, writing, feedback, and more writing, the committee landed on the Focus Areas and Priorities that follow. These priorities reflect what we heard from our community and the vision shared by the Board and school leadership.



COMMUNITY-WIDE
SURVEYS:
861
RESPONSES
5,000+
COMMENTS

Hearing the Paideia Community

The core of our process was all about listening to our community and synthesizing that input. Here’s a snapshot of what we heard.

Paideia’s faculty and staff help build a remarkable learning community that fosters growth and development in our children.

- ▶ Parents noted that students love Paideia’s staff and engaging environment, and the personal growth those elements foster.
- ▶ Faculty members described Paideia as the best place to work and learn, emphasizing that the school’s care for its teachers keeps them motivated and happy. This creates “profound ripple effects” in the classroom.

Our academic program is one of our greatest strengths, and we can expand current teacher evaluation to ensure even greater coherence across levels, grades, and courses.

- ▶ Feedback indicated that teachers’ freedom to design curriculum is a core part of Paideia’s identity, and that guidelines may be needed to fully support the desired coherence.
- ▶ Respondents also highlighted the need for better academic support for students with learning challenges.

The school’s deeply human ethos requires a more intentional approach to determining when and in what ways we incorporate technology (computers, phones, AI, and more) into our learning environment.

- ▶ The community identified a critical need to adapt to technological changes and grapple with AI, both to improve pedagogy and mitigate potential harms to student learning and mental health.

The school’s historical commitment to DEIB is one of its greatest strengths, and there is still room to grow in fostering a true sense of belonging for every member of the community.

- ▶ Respondents noted that experiences vary and feelings of inclusion and belonging differ among community members.
- ▶ Community members expressed a long-term wish for Paideia to weave diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) into the “very fiber of the curriculum” so these values serve as part of the bedrock and not as an add-on.

Our open campus is one of our school’s defining characteristics and maintaining its open feel while improving safety is a community imperative.

- ▶ The community’s long-term wish is to maintain a feeling of openness and connectedness, while ensuring safety, accessibility, and sustainable growth.
- ▶ Some in the community noted that athletics need attention, to ensure equal access to necessary facilities across Paideia’s athletic programs.
- ▶ We also heard calls for more spaces dedicated to connection and, specifically, community gatherings.

Financial accessibility is central to Paideia’s identity and protecting it will require deliberate and targeted action to relieve the strain that many families are feeling.

- ▶ Community members worry the school was founded as a more accessible alternative to traditional prep schools, but is now “pricing out the very families that provide the diversity of thought we value.”





FOCUS AREA 1

Paideia the School
providing an exceptional, challenging, and joyful education

There’s something special about Paideia graduates; students who find a confident voice, deep stores of kindness and compassion, intellectual curiosity, and the courage to make their mark on the world. Developing children like this is no accident. It requires attentive, creative educators working in trusting partnership with families.

To offer each student deep intellectual engagement and an individualized, challenging academic program—in an environment that fosters joy and compassion, we will:

- 1 Enrich student learning throughout the school by defining high teaching standards that both honor our teachers’ agency to design passion-driven classrooms, and deliver a coherent and consistently excellent academic experience for all students.
- 2 Expand our investment in the well-being and mental health of every student, recognizing that a child’s capacity to learn, connect, and thrive depends on being seen and supported.
- 3 Ensure our curriculum (what is taught) and pedagogy (how it’s taught) reflect our school’s commitment to DEIB. Students should see themselves, their peers, and their teachers broadly reflected in their coursework.
- 4 Increase our investments in maintaining a talented and diverse cohort of caring, skilled educators. We know that attracting, developing, and retaining an exceptional faculty and staff requires investment in their professional growth, compensation, and benefits that support their wellness.
- 5 Establish a clear philosophy on technology’s role in student life and learning, develop shared practices in the classroom, and form an active partnership with families to navigate the rapidly changing landscape in a way that embraces technology responsibly while maintaining human connection for our students.



Paideia’s Strategic Focus Areas and Priorities

The strategic plan we are building will honor Paideia’s strong foundations while asking what comes next. The purpose of the focus areas and priorities is to define where we will channel our energy and resources over the next few years. They are framed in terms of our school, our community, and our campus, reflecting who we are and who we are working to become.

FOCUS AREA 2

Paideia the Community

expanding affordability, belonging, and connection

At Paideia, “community” is a verb. We value connection and diversity. We are grounded in empathy and love. And we fall short when any one of us feels disconnected or on the margins. Maintaining a strong community requires each of us to be active, intentional, and vigilant.

To forge a community of students, families, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends that is warm and accessible, invites participation and ownership, and is dedicated to creating a deep sense of belonging for every single member, we will:

- 1 Embrace our responsibility to ensure that equity and belonging are genuinely felt by every member of our community, not just stated as values. We will examine honestly where we fall short and take concrete steps to better live up to that promise.
- 2 Increase diversity across every dimension of our community, knowing that the more our students, faculty, and staff can see themselves reflected in our community, the stronger our school will be. We will be especially intentional about diverse student enrollment at our key entry points (half-day, K, 6, 7, and 9).
- 3 Ensure that a Paideia education is available to families across a much wider range of financial circumstances than it is today through an aggressive endowment growth strategy designed to reduce our dependence on tuition and broaden access to financial aid. We will also address less visible financial pressures and the everyday costs for all of our families.
- 4 Expand our definition of parent involvement and actively create the conditions for each family to participate, recognizing that every family has something to give.
- 5 Build stronger connections to the Pythons who can’t make it to campus each day: alumni, parents of alumni, grandparents, former faculty & staff, and others. Their connection to Paideia is part of what makes us who we are and we intend to nurture it.



FOCUS AREA 3

Paideia the Place

strengthening our campus home for the future of Paideia

Our campus has always been a main character in Paideia’s story— both because of its distinctive look and composition, and how it supports learning, connection, and belonging. The recent completion of the new Junior High and the resulting High School expansion, substantial investments in deferred maintenance, recent campus safety enhancements, and our exciting new renovation of Python Park have all contributed to the evolution of our campus home.

To continue to imagine our campus as a setting for school, and as a vibrant, inviting, and accessible home for students and families, we will:

- 1 Ensure our school is and feels safe and secure for all community members, while preserving the campus’s defining sense of freedom and openness.
- 2 Increase campus accessibility for every member of our community, both in how people move through our buildings and grounds and in how they get to and from school, reflecting accessibility as an expression of our values.
- 3 Develop spaces intentionally designed for moments that bring our community together, recognizing that as we’ve expanded, gathering as a whole community requires more intention, more occasions, and more space.
- 4 Conduct a comprehensive campus planning process that imagines the future of our historic buildings and grounds, surfaces opportunities for programmatic growth, and is guided by our commitment to environmental sustainability.



What Comes Next: Implementation

*“And we’re still
not through...”*

The Board’s adoption last spring of our Strategic Focus Areas and Priorities represents the completion of the first half of our work on our strategic planning process.

This summer Tom and the school’s administrative team began the important work of Phase 2: implementation. The school, in continued partnership with Mission & Data, will work to articulate what success looks like in each of our priorities, establish ownership, metrics, and timelines for each, and begin tracking progress.

Taken together, Phase 1 (the development and adoption of our Focus Areas and Priorities) and Phase 2 (the implementation plan) will constitute our strategic plan. This document will evolve as the full plan takes shape.

Additionally, work has already begun on core areas of the plan. We’ve started the development of a comprehensive campus plan, made substantial investments in campus safety, dedicated faculty professional development time to mental health, and more.

As work continues, community partnership and investment will be critical to our success. Expect community updates and opportunities to get involved throughout the year.



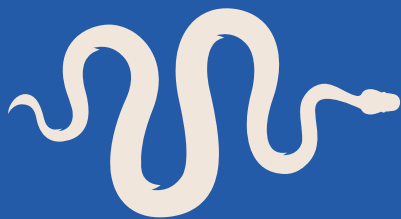
What is “paideia”?

“We understand the word to mean the total education and development of children, intentionally guided by a community. The Greeks were not advocating just intellectual, civic, or physical development; they intended the formation of character and spiritual values.

Our interpretation of paideia is essential to understanding the character of our school. And it is, like the core value of educational authority, rare.”

“We state in both words and practice, that the best way to prepare for a productive and emotionally healthy adult life is to create an emotionally healthy and productive environment for children. This value means that we enjoy today and each other as we prepare for the future, and that the quality of today affects tomorrow. We shall not let the future crowd out the present, nor do we assume that we can control the future as much as we can influence the present.”

PAUL BIANCHI,
Founding Head of School



THE PAIDEIA SCHOOL