Groton School
Strategic Framework 2030
Beyond Access to Success: Inclusion and Belonging



GROTON SCHOOL'S mission is "to inspire lives of character, scholarship, leadership, and service within a diverse, inclusive, and close-knit community."

As Groton School founder Endicott Peabody recognized, achieving the school's educational mission depends greatly upon the quality of the environment where students live and learn. This belief continues to guide the philosophy of the school. As the mission statement explicitly emphasizes: what we teach our students (to pursue lives of character, scholarship, leadership, and service) and where they develop those traits (within a diverse, inclusive, and close-knit community) are intertwined. While Groton has long maintained a leadership position regarding the first half of the mission (to inspire lives of character, scholarship, leadership, and service), the school's most significant recent progress involves the work to deliver a diverse, inclusive, and close-knit community.

Groton's achievements since 2015 demonstrate that investing in inclusion and belonging can reinforce scholarly excellence, leadership development, spiritual exploration, and service. The emphasis on inclusion has enhanced each of these areas, as well as the school's ability to achieve its mission. Thus, the following strategic framework is grounded not only in continuing the investments of recent years, but in taking them further—*beyond a diverse and inclusive community to a community centered on belonging*, which will foster even greater levels of character, scholarship, leadership, and service, strengthening the school and its mission.


GROTON

Background

Through the GRoton Affordability and INclusion (GRAIN) initiative, Groton has strived with determination, and considerable success, to increase accessibility and affordability and bring inclusion to the center of life on the Circle. GRAIN's success has enhanced Groton School's leadership position.

The remarkable fundraising success of GRAIN enabled Groton to freeze tuition for three years (2015–16 through 2017–18) and hold tuition increases to 1.5 percent in the subsequent five years (through 2022–23)—less than half the average rate of increase among peer schools during that five-year period. As a result, Groton's tuition plummeted from the most expensive among its peer schools to the least expensive. And the school remains committed to containing tuition in the future.

Over the past seven years, affordability and accessibility have also increased through financial aid. With a particular focus on families that often assume they will not qualify for aid (the "talented missing middle"), Groton has increased the percentage of students receiving financial aid by 27 percent since the 2014–15 academic year. At the start of the 2021–22 school year, 45 percent of the current student body was receiving financial aid, up from 36 percent in 2014–15. The increase opens the Circle to a broader range of experiences and perspectives, which enriches the Groton experience and benefits every member of the school community.

As a result of GRAIN's success and the establishment of the GRoton Accelerate Challenge Enrich (GRACE) summer program, Groton takes students beyond access to academic success. Now a well-established academic program for rising Fourth Formers, GRACE addresses any preparation gap students may face while also allowing an opportunity to advance in areas of interest and strength. In addition, the summer experience on the Circle promotes inclusivity and builds community.

The focus on inclusion enriches every aspect of student life on the Circle. Through the efforts of the Residential Life Working Group and the Curriculum Working Group, the school is undertaking a systematic examination of the curricular and residential experience to strengthen diversity, inclusion, and the experience of belonging.

The community's focus on student well-being and social/emotional development is essential to an inclusive and close-knit environment and already has resulted in quantifiable improvements in recent years: for example, there are 3.25 FTEs (plus interns) in the Department of Counseling and Psychological Services today, compared to 1.5 in 2013; four forms take health classes, which were offered to only one form in 2013; Active Minds became a student organization in 2019; peer counselors now receive training based on a nationally accredited curriculum; and space increased, with the addition of a counseling suite and a wellness center. The school has intensified its focus on health and wellness and considers it a prerequisite to all other goals within this framework.

Based on input from students, faculty, administrators, and trustees, this framework reflects the goals and aspirations of the entire community, and we will continue to collaborate with community members and seek their input throughout its implementation. We acknowledge the challenges we may face when fostering a community centered on inclusion and belonging, and we embrace the opportunity to explore them.

Core Values and Guiding Principles

The school's core values and guiding principles informed the creation of this strategic framework.

Core Values: Groton's values are our foundation and guide the pursuit of our mission.

Groton's faculty and staff are deeply devoted to their craft and the school, our students are able and engaged, our parents believe in our mission, and our alumni live it. We aspire to instill the following core skills and qualities in our students, which we believe will inspire them to fulfill our mission:

Character

- Personal integrity
- Empathy and selflessness
- Courage and resilience
- Engaged and ethical global citizenship
- Commitment to inclusion and belonging
- Spiritual or religious searching and self-inquiry
- Vision, conviction, and personal responsibility

Scholarship

- Critical thinking, writing, and problem-solving
- Creativity and imagination
- Learning across all core disciplines
- Preparation for a sustainable future
- Active listening, communicating, and collaborating

Guiding Principles: Trustees, faculty, staff, and members of the Forms of 2019 and 2020 helped develop guiding principles for this strategic framework.

- Groton's small, close-knit, and cohesive community is essential to who we are.
- A diverse and inclusive community, with varying backgrounds and viewpoints, is integral to an outstanding education. Diversity encompasses many dimensions, including race, religion, socioeconomic status, geography, nationality, gender identity, and sexual orientation.
- Groton sets high academic standards and provides an exceptional academic experience, going well beyond knowledge and achievement to instill a love of learning and comprehension of the value of scholarship.
- Groton believes that all students can provide valuable leadership in their own way, and the school is committed to developing strong and ethical leaders. The school is structured to teach and enable leadership and to empower future leaders.
- Groton recognizes that it is critical for students to understand the nature of today's interconnected global community and their place and responsibilities within it.
- Imbuing a sense of service in students, a commitment deeply woven throughout the school's history, is central to the Groton experience.
- Groton is committed to attracting, supporting, and retaining faculty who are lifelong learners dedicated to the craft of teaching and who demonstrate excellence both through their subjects and through the care they show their students.

Groton's Strategic Framework 2030



A primary goal of this strategic framework is to underscore Groton's leadership among all secondary independent schools, not only in scholarship but also in the areas of inclusion, affordability, and belonging—to consolidate and advance the progress we have made as we evolve into an even more diverse, inclusive, and close-knit community.

To achieve this goal, Groton must make sure that every student—regardless of background or financial circumstances—feels seen and has the tools to thrive, thereby empowering Groton students to develop "lives of character, scholarship, leadership, and service."

Our strategic framework allows us to align our entire community around a set of clearly defined objectives, with consistent measures of progress that provide guideposts for action while allowing for agility in our uncertain world. It also identifies measures of progress toward the articulated objectives for broadening and deepening inclusion and belonging, as well as several near-term initiatives that we intend to pursue.

Five elements serve as the foundation beneath our overarching goal of inclusion and belonging: Affordability, Well-Being and Social/Emotional Development, Inclusive Excellence in Scholarship, An Inclusive Campus, and Community Ownership of Inclusion and Belonging.





Affordability

The school is committed to ensuring that cost is never a barrier to a Groton education. We believe in directing the school's resources first and foremost to people, and thus are committed to making a Groton education accessible.

The GRAIN initiative, adopted as the school's #1 strategic priority in 2014, contained tuition while increasing the number of students on financial aid and guaranteeing that the school would consider all applicants without regard for their ability to pay. GRAIN is strong (supported by $53 million raised in the first three years and a total of $76 million as of May 2022). However, the impact of GRAIN could be fragile without a solid commitment to sustaining the groundbreaking initiative.

Objectives

- To strive to have the most affordable tuition level among our forty peer (ABOPS) schools, both to increase appeal and to reinforce our commitment to fight the national trend toward spiraling tuition in education. Additionally:

  No student is denied admission because of financial need.

  No admitted student decides not to attend Groton because of financial need.

  We maintain approximately twenty-five Inclusion Scholars at any given time by adding six new Inclusion Scholars each year, including students entering Second Form.

- To ensure that GRAIN's commitment to tuition containment, access, affordability, inclusion, and belonging is deeply embedded in Groton's culture as well as in its overall financial structure
- To maintain both the financial resilience needed to keep tuition increases modest and our commitment to financial aid by ensuring that our endowment grows over time (through new gifts, investment returns, and prudent spending)

Key Strategic Measures

- Groton's tuition relative to our forty peer (ABOPS) schools
- The number of Inclusion Scholars
- The degree to which financial aid is not a consideration in admission decisions and decisions to attend Groton



Well-Being and Social/Emotional Development—Prerequisites

Students' well-being and social/emotional development are prerequisites to the sense of belonging emphasized in this strategic framework. In fact, they are prerequisites to all other goals—essential if Groton is to advance its mission and provide students the opportunity to reach their full academic, athletic, spiritual, artistic, and personal potential.

Research indicates that a sense of belonging is essential to an adolescent's well-being and effective functioning and is a critical motivator of human behavior. It is especially important between the ages of twelve and eighteen, when adolescents establish a sense of self and how they fit into the world. Groton School recognizes the influence it has on students' development and well-being. In addition, we believe that prospective families increasingly will consider a school's commitment to and investment in student well-being and social/emotional development; likewise, well-being competencies will become increasingly important and valued in life beyond Groton.

Objectives

- To be a school that prioritizes student well-being and social-emotional development, and to be known as such
- To create an environment where the health, counseling, and well-being programs are interconnected and collectively provide a safe destination for students to seek care and support
- To create an environment and programming that promote the development of physical and psychological well-being for every Groton student, both on the Circle and in their lives beyond Groton
- To help every student develop self-awareness, awareness of others, and the ability to self-regulate across emotional, behavioral, and cognitive realms
- To foster a culture in which students are encouraged to address life's stressors and are comfortable seeking help from peers and adults
- To provide faculty and staff with the tools to promote positive health and social/emotional well-being within the student community

Key Strategic Measures

- Student well-being assessments (including the Independent School Health Check) to confirm that students feel they have a place on campus, possess effective communication skills, are able to regulate emotions appropriately, have strong interpersonal relationships, experience civil discourse, and experience effective problem-solving
- Student participation in programming, including health classes and voluntary wellness activities, and use of spaces dedicated to wellness
- Student self-referrals to counseling
- Student-counselor ratio
- Feedback from recent graduates
- Parent use of resources dedicated to health and well-being on Groton's website
- Peer school inquiries about our program

Inclusive Excellence in Scholarship

Excellence in scholarship has long been a hallmark of a Groton education. The school believes that a foundational sense of confidence and belonging facilitates scholarly excellence, and in turn that scholarship is inextricably linked to confidence. Groton is committed to providing an equitable and supportive learning environment where students achieve this critical sense of belonging, allowing them to reach their full academic potential. Excellence also requires a global perspective, enhanced through periodic adjustment of the curriculum and co-curricular activities and GEOs (Global Educational Opportunities), which allow students to engage deeply with differing perspectives and experiences, both within and outside the United States.

Objectives

- To ensure that all students have access to experiences and resources that allow them to fulfill their potential as scholars
- To ensure that Groton's curriculum remains relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the world today, providing students with a comprehensive and multi-faceted perspective on content learned, as well as the ability to understand and articulate what they are studying
- To reinforce awareness of students' cognitive well-being, providing resources to identify and support those with various learning styles
- To sustain and enhance domestic and international experiences for students, ensuring that all students have academic and co-curricular experiences that build cultural knowledge and global perspectives

Key Strategic Measures

- Diversity of perspectives in the curriculum (including diversity of pedagogical methods, materials assigned, assessment methods, and classroom management approaches)
- Student experience regarding the relevance, inclusiveness, and diversity of curricula
- Degree and diversity of student participation in GEOs (international and domestic)
- Diversity of GEO offerings
- Participation in GRACE, including regular evaluation of how well GRACE is helping students reach their potential

An Inclusive Campus

Each student's sense of belonging will be influenced by experiences across campus—by academic, athletic, residential, and extracurricular offerings; by school policies; and by seeing themselves represented in the community. The physical environment—including the buildings, building names, statues, and artwork—is an essential factor in creating a sense of belonging.

Objective

- To create a visual and experiential environment inside the Circle that offers everyone—students, faculty, and staff—the opportunity to feel belonging each day, across campus and in every activity

Key Strategic Measures

- Student feelings of belonging (through student assessment)
- Diversity of students, faculty, staff, and trustees
- Diversity in student leadership positions
- Degree to which buildings, physical spaces, and artworks represent diverse groups
- Quantity and quality of belonging-oriented gatherings and events on campus



Community Ownership of Inclusion and Belonging

Creating a culture of inclusion, belonging, and well-being is complex and requires perpetual community investment, support, and advocacy. Success will require increased engagement throughout the entire Groton community—including alumni, parents, and past parents. Community members who feel they belong are more likely to share a sense of ownership and responsibility for the school's success.

Objectives

- To build on areas of strength and foster a greater sense of belonging among all constituencies, including alumni, past and current parents, and other community members, and to inspire community ownership of the importance of belonging to the school's mission
- To inspire all members of the Groton family to invest time, talent, and treasure in support of achieving and sustaining the inclusion and belonging to which this strategic framework, our mission, and our school aspire

Key Strategic Measures

- Constituent engagement (participation in events, email open rates, visits to campus) and feedback
- Volunteer participation and, more specifically, engagement of underrepresented constituents in volunteer opportunities
- Participation in giving to the Groton Fund and endowment/capital initiatives
- GRAIN and GRACE fundraising: Fully fund GRAIN 2.0 at $25 million and fully endow GRACE at $5 million



Groton School Mission:

To inspire lives of character, scholarship, leadership, and service within a diverse, inclusive, and close-knit community