

WIS

WASHINGTON
INTERNATIONAL
— SCHOOL —

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020





In 1966, a small group of visionaries founded Washington International School with a stated purpose that set us apart from other Washington-area schools – to provide dual-language education to members of the international community and others desiring an international education for their children.

From our initial enrollment of three four-year-olds in a basement, WIS pursued strategic growth to achieve our current enrollment of 900 Preschool to Grade 12 students on two campuses. WIS has become a destination school, a model for educators around the globe, and the hub of an intentionally international community.

The process of creating this Plan has affirmed that our founding purpose remains not just relevant, but valuable. Members of the WIS community are drawn to the school for our unique program – a rigorous dual-language international education that emphasizes student agency in learning and engagement with the world. This purpose remains

at the core of all that we do. The 2020 Strategic Plan sets strategic objectives for continuous fulfillment of that purpose.

Our mission is to be an exemplary learning community – enriched by differences, informed through inquiry, global in reach.

The Strategic Planning Process

Strategic planning is a core responsibility of the WIS Board of Trustees. As the Head of School is WIS's chief executive officer and our lead professional educator, the vision and the expertise of the Head and her team is crucial in the development of a strategic plan. The Board thus established a Strategic Planning Task Force, consisting of three trustees and the Head, with a mandate to organize and guide the development of this Plan. To complete its work, the Task Force retained an external consultant with expertise in both international education and independent schools. The Task Force adopted an inclusive approach that engaged trustees, administration, faculty, staff, WIS Parents Association (WISPA) officers, parents, students, and alumni.

Beginning in fall 2018, over 750 community members participated in initial surveys. Simultaneously, the Board began planning for a December 2018 Retreat, where Board members, WIS administrators, and a WISPA representative explored four topics that could impact the long-term success of the school: enrollment, financial aid, curriculum, and demand.

After examining survey results and recommendations from the Retreat, the Task Force, in partnership with the WIS administrative team, conducted further analysis and investigation. This included more than 20 focus groups involving over 200 members of the community. In spring and summer 2019, the Task Force guided the drafting of this Plan. A Strategic Planning Red Team, consisting of trustees not on the Task Force, conducted a critical review of the draft Plan in August 2019. The Board of Trustees unanimously approved the Plan in October 2019.

While this is a five-year plan, it has elements we expect to complete sooner. And there are elements that will extend beyond five years. The Head of School and her team will provide annual updates to the WIS community regarding progress in achieving this Plan. Moreover, because strategic thinking is essential to continuous improvement, the Board has established a Strategic Initiatives Task Force to examine – on an ongoing basis – forces that may substantially impact WIS's fulfillment of its mission. This Task Force's work may inform the implementation of this Plan.

We are grateful to all who took part in the strategic planning process and provided insight to guide WIS in addressing our current and future challenges.

Testing the Status Quo

We conducted extensive analyses to determine whether maintaining certain fundamental elements of our current structure is best for WIS. We examined enrollment, curricular frameworks, and language offerings.

ENROLLMENT

An important element of our analysis, which informed many other aspects of the Strategic Plan, was WIS's enrollment structure. We considered whether the current enrollment of 900 students and the structure for each grade (roughly equal enrollment in Kindergarten through 12, lower enrollment in Preschool/Pre-K) is optimal.

Initial considerations suggested that increased enrollment might enable additional course offerings, a more expansive athletics program, and a richer social experience for students. We then analyzed the costs and risks associated with these presumed benefits, and concluded the following:

- Demand for independent education, while strong at WIS, is impacted across the country by escalating tuition. Many parents are opting for public or charter schools for the primary years and turning to independent schools for the secondary years. We thus concluded that expanding enrollment at the primary school level is not advisable.
- The need to maintain current student-teacher ratios, coupled with financial constraints, prohibits expansion of grades by less than an entire section (roughly 18 students per grade), which would bring attendant needs for additional teachers and classroom space.
- The supply of mission-appropriate students – those who have the language skills, commitment to international education, and capacity to successfully complete the IB Diploma Program – may not support enrollment of entire new sections.
- Enrollment caps at both campuses would need to be raised to allow for significant growth, and major capital expenditures would be needed to accommodate additional students.

Given these factors, this Strategic Plan assumes that our target all-school enrollment will remain at 900 students for the foreseeable future.



CURRICULAR FRAMEWORKS

We examined whether our curricular frameworks – the IB Primary Years Program (PYP) and IB Diploma Program (DP) – should remain in place. Focus groups, faculty surveys, and consultation with university recruiters led us to the following conclusions:

- The DP is intrinsic to and synonymous with a WIS education. Students and parents believe that completing the full DP is an important and achievable goal.
- Universities recognize the rigor of the DP. WIS students not enrolled in the full IB DP would be perceived less favorably in comparison to WIS peers who complete the full DP.
- Primary School parents and faculty value inquiry, dual-language education, an international community, and a transdisciplinary curriculum.
- There is insufficient evidence to conclude whether the PYP framework itself is highly valued by parents and faculty. While the PYP is inquiry-based and transdisciplinary, other frameworks also offer these features.

These conclusions firmly support maintaining the DP as the sole curricular framework for Grades 11 and 12. We have concluded, however, that we must gather additional inputs and further analyze the PYP as delivered at WIS. By the end of the 2019–2020 school year, we will determine if the costs of the



PYP (e.g., administrative/structural constraints and fees paid to the IB) are outweighed by the benefits.

LANGUAGE OFFERINGS

English, French, and Spanish have been a core part of the WIS program for most of our history. In 2007, we added Mandarin Chinese at the secondary school as an option for newcomers to the language. We examined these offerings and concluded the following:

- Demand for French and Spanish remains strong, and other languages should not be substituted for them.
- Incorporating an additional language at the Primary School level would result in significant expense in terms of additional faculty and facility requirements.

- There is no evidence of significant unmet demand for Primary School level Mandarin language education at the WIS price point.

- Achievement in Mandarin fluency would not be on par with Spanish and French results, due to difficulty in finding qualified teaching staff and low enrollment of children who already speak Mandarin at home.

We thus concluded we should not add Mandarin to the dual-language program at the Primary School. However, there is potential for more rigorous Mandarin preparation through Primary School after school classes. The School also is committed to maintaining strong enrollment in the Grades 6–12 Mandarin program.



Our Strategic Priorities

- Enhance the WIS curriculum to better fulfill the WIS mission.
- Foster diversity consistent with the WIS mission.
- Reconnect and more deeply engage alumni and their families with the School.
- Ensure WIS facilities support the WIS mission.
- Highlight WIS as a destination school for families, faculty, and staff.

Enhance the WIS curriculum to better fulfill the WIS mission.



Throughout the process of analyzing how the curriculum might be enhanced to better fulfill our mission, the core tenet that a WIS education prepares students to engage in the world and to communicate effectively in at least two languages remained at the forefront.

As noted above, the Primary School's core academic program will continue with English, French, and Spanish. We will continue to offer Mandarin at the secondary school level as an additional language, and to support the tutoring of additional languages.

Desired Outcomes

- An enhanced framework for a Primary School education that remains transdisciplinary and inquiry-based, and where each child studies in two languages.
- Ongoing improvement in supporting the student experience and achievement in the IB Program.
- A flexible, responsive, educational approach that continues to equip students with the skills and competencies to ensure their success in tertiary education and beyond.

TO ACHIEVE THESE OUTCOMES, WE WILL FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

Primary School Curriculum

- Increase support for faculty members in creating inquiry-focused classrooms.
- Facilitate faculty collaboration to allow for continuity and consistency between students' educational experiences in both languages.
- Determine – by the end of the 2019-2020 school year – whether the IB Primary Years Program framework provides sufficient flexibility to implement WIS's dual-language program effectively.

IB Diploma Program

- Provide enhanced guidance and support to students to make the best choices for DP courses.
- Ensure students have the greatest opportunity to complete the DP successfully, providing additional academic and social/emotional support as needed.

Skills and Competencies

- Empower and educate faculty so they are better able to integrate evolving technology skills and literacy in their teaching.
- Create additional opportunities (during and outside of the regular school day) – including independent study (individually or in groups) and online options – to support skill development in areas not emphasized in the WIS curriculum.
- Examine and adjust as appropriate the alignment of skills and competencies offered through a WIS secondary education – especially in the area of technology – with those desired by universities and employers.

Foster diversity
consistent with the
WIS mission.



Since its founding, WIS has benefitted from a community of diverse identities and perspectives. Our community is enriched by differences and united in the conviction that international-mindedness is a crucial attitude to foster in WIS students.

A source of strength for WIS – and also a challenge – is that, unlike at many schools, diversity at WIS is defined through a number of different lenses. We are an international school that is a part of the greater Washington community. This is the framework in which we must more clearly articulate our institutional approach to diversity. Such an approach must define and promote diversity in a way that ensures multiple viewpoints are included and valued in the life of the school, in a manner that supports our dual language, international education.

As we work to develop a shared understanding of diversity at WIS, we are clear in one regard: a qualified student's access to a WIS education should not be limited by inability to pay our tuition. WIS has provided financial aid to about 13% of students in recent years, but we currently have no sustainable way to increase this percentage significantly. While other schools draw on endowment resources to supplement financial aid, the WIS endowment per student is a small fraction of what is available to our peer schools. WIS must commit to building our endowment.

Desired Outcomes

- A better-defined and enhanced approach to diversity and inclusion across our community of students, faculty, staff, and parents.
- Increased access to a WIS education through greater financial aid.
- More visible respect for and inclusion of all voices.

TO ACHIEVE THESE OUTCOMES, WE WILL FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

Diversity

- Determine and articulate the forms of diversity that we currently represent and wish to better represent.
- Examine, in coordination with the WIS Staff Association, employee compensation to determine potential tactics to attract and retain underrepresented populations.
- Attract underrepresented populations through differentiated outreach and marketing.

Access

- Determine, prior to the 2021–2022 admissions season, whether offering financial aid at Preschool and Pre-K can improve socio-economic diversity, cognizant of the budget impact of increased aid and the uncertainties of offering aid to very young students.
- Build the endowment substantially (through budget allocations and philanthropy) to enable a long-term commitment to increased financial aid.

Inclusion

- Continue to foster an environment where respect for and inclusion of all is the expected behavior.
- Ensure we have support structures in place to give students receiving financial aid the greatest chance for success.
- Become a model for open and ongoing communication regarding issues of inclusion.

Reconnect and more deeply engage alumni and their families with the School.



Survey and anecdotal evidence reveal that WIS alumni remain connected to each other long after they graduate. Likewise, many alumni cherish the relationships they developed with teachers while at WIS.

WIS has an informal alumni program that has been effective in promoting relationships between alumni and individuals at WIS. A more intentional, outcome-driven alumni program will strengthen ongoing engagement between the alumni community and the school. This will allow WIS to better highlight and celebrate the accomplishments of the alumni community, contributing to a heightened understanding of the value of a WIS education. In the long-term, increased alumni philanthropic support will increase our endowment and decrease the School's reliance on tuition income.



Desired Outcomes

- Enhanced networking among alumni, as well as between alumni and current students.
- Stronger connections between alumni families and WIS, achieved through participation in events and philanthropic support.

TO ACHIEVE THESE OUTCOMES, WE WILL FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

Alumni Networking

- Expand alumni mentoring relationships.
- Encourage alumni to connect with peers by serving on the Alumni Leadership Council, acting as class agents or regional volunteers, and participating in class reunion activities.

Alumni-WIS Engagement

- Develop new communications strategies and tactics to keep alumni and their families informed about activities and initiatives at WIS.
- Increase alumni visits to WIS for events, as volunteer speakers, or in other appropriate capacities.
- Develop and implement messages and tactics to increase alumni philanthropy toward WIS.

Ensure WIS facilities support the WIS mission.



WIS needs to undertake ongoing maintenance and development so our facilities enhance, rather than limit, a WIS education. WIS achieved most of the facilities-related goals outlined in the previous strategic plan, many of which focused on renovating and updating existing spaces and systems. We now have both funding and a program for systematic replacement, renewal, and maintenance of current facilities.

We must, however, consider ongoing upgrades, renovation, and re-purposing that will enable WIS to continue to deliver a world-class education. The most pressing of these upgrades is completing construction of new science-centric facilities, with related improvements to the Tregaron campus.

Desired Outcomes

- Improved science-centric facilities designed in alignment with recommended standards for science education.
- A long-term Campus Improvement Plan that reimagines how existing facilities can be renovated to enhance the WIS educational experience across the curriculum.
- A school environment that prioritizes safety through better traffic and visitor management.

TO ACHIEVE THESE OUTCOMES, WE WILL FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

Science-Centric Facilities

- Ensure new facilities will be approved by the regulatory authorities.
- Complete construction of new facilities at the earliest possible date.

Reimagining Spaces

- Create a plan to use current science spaces to optimize programmatic needs (following construction of new science-centric facilities).
- Provide better dining and kitchen facilities, as well as social and study spaces for students.

Maintaining Safety

- Limit the intersection of pedestrians and vehicles.
- Decrease traffic and on-campus parking.
- Systemize visitor management in alignment with child protection policies and goals.



Highlight WIS as
a destination school
for families, faculty,
and staff.



Within the Washington area, WIS is recognized for its success in dual-language international education. Likewise, as one of the earliest IB Diploma Program schools, WIS has established clear leadership in the delivery and execution of an IB DP education. A lengthy and strong partnership with Project Zero has given WIS educators considerable expertise and experience in teaching for understanding. And the WIS Summer Institute for Teachers (WISSIT) has established WIS as an innovator in professional development.

All of these factors contribute to WIS's position as a destination school for both students and employees, but the School exists within a competitive independent school market where families feel pressure from increasing tuition. WIS must therefore leverage and highlight the value of a WIS education in order to attract and retain qualified students and exceptional staff, while enhancing the School's reputation locally and internationally.

Desired Outcomes

- Greater recognition of the excellence and relevance of the WIS program, raising the School's profile among families not actively seeking an international education.
- Increased appreciation and understanding of the opportunities and advantages of working at WIS.
- Engagement with new partners and programs, to bolster WIS's visibility and/or to provide alternate revenue streams.

TO ACHIEVE THESE OUTCOMES, WE WILL FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

Awareness of WIS

- Increase the School's visibility within the local and international media and educational communities.
- Diversify marketing strategies and tactics to better highlight the unique attributes of a WIS education.

Attract and Retain Faculty

- Analyze trends in faculty hiring and retention and assess incentives, compensation, and work environment in order to meet hiring and retention goals.
- Promote the professional development program and the Professional Development Collaborative at WIS (PDC @WIS) beyond the existing websites.
- Increase faculty leadership and participation at conferences and workshops.



New Partners and Programs

- Assess whether additional partners – for instance, educational institutions and organizations associated with language learning – offer opportunities to advance WIS's mission.
- Determine the potential benefits and costs of offering language instruction, or other course offerings, to non-WIS students, potentially including adult learners.



WIS BOARD OF TRUSTEES, 2019–2020

Leanna Beaber
Kim Boylan
Jefferson Burnett (*Vice Chair*)
Melissa Burnett
Pierre Chao
Stylianos Christofides, *WIS Alumnus*
Rick Cruz
Giovanni Dell'Ariccia
Ayanna Dunn, *WIS Alumna*
Renata Hesse
James Iker
Katherine Kinsella
Edgar Nehme
Nandini Oomman
John Reppas
Kleber Santos
Miguel Savastano
Melissa Schwartz
Constantine Stavropoulos
Alexia Von Lipsey (*Secretary*)
Marc Williamson (*Chair*)
Suzanna Jemsby, *Head of School*
(*Ex Officio*)
Benjamin Getahun, *WISPA*
Co-President (Ex Officio)

STRATEGIC PLANNING TASK FORCE

Suzanna Jemsby
Katherine Kinsella
Kleber Santos
Marc Williamson

STRATEGIC PLANNING RED TEAM

Jefferson Burnett
Pierre Chao
Diana Farrell (*WIS Board of Trustees, 2013–2019*)

CONSULTANT TO THE STRATEGIC PLANNING TASK FORCE

Kevin J. Ruth, *Executive Director,*
Educational Collaborative for International Schools

STAFF STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

Marisa Alford, *Director of Advancement*
Randy Althaus, *Middle School Principal*
Richard Anderson, *Director of Academic Technology*
Kimberly Bennett, *Director of Marketing and*
Communications
Natasha Bhalla, *Associate Head of School*
Tim Fuderich, *Former Director of Alumni and Constituent*
Relations
Suzanna Jemsby, *Head of School*
Javid Majdi, *Director of Information Technology*
David Markus, *Former Upper School Principal*
Mary Hastings Moore, *Director of Admissions and*
Financial Aid
Bethany Neumann, *Chief Financial Officer*
Jim Reese, *Director of the Professional Development*
Collaborative at WIS
Dale Temple, *Director of Facilities and Operations*

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES TASK FORCE

Kimberly Bennett
Jefferson Burnett
Rick Cruz
Suzanna Jemsby
Katherine Kinsella
Daniel Pink
Jim Reese

