

Giffit Hill School

Strategic Plan 2023-2028

To the Giffit Hill School Community:

The Strategic Planning Committee and the Board of Trustees of Giffit Hill School are pleased to present our 2023-2028 Strategic Plan. I would like to thank the Committee for their time, hard work, commitment to the process, and dedication to the future of GHS. This document is truly a consensus of a wide variety of stakeholders in our School and island community and is the result of input from trustees, faculty, parents, students, community leaders and friends.

The Giffit Hill School Board has adopted the Strategic Plan to use as a roadmap for the next five years. Together, the Board of Trustees, Head of School, Faculty and Staff will use the Strategic Plan to prioritize goals and develop resources to ensure the school is ready to meet the educational needs of our community for the next 50 years.

This is an exciting and important time for Giffit Hill School. As we look to the future, we want to be certain that we stay connected to our 45-year history and our unique island community. We will build upon the existing strengths that make Giffit Hill School and St. John distinctive as we develop new relationships and structures essential to our future growth and success.

Dr. Ruth Alden Doan
Chair, Board of Trustees

Mission Statement

Giff Hill School offers our island community an inclusive, experiential education that sees each child as an individual and inspires each to excel. We support and challenge our students to approach complex problems resourcefully, to understand and advocate for the environment, and to honor the culture and history of Caribbean peoples. Our graduates are resilient, caring community leaders at home and abroad.

Diversity Resolution

The Trustees of Giff Hill School believe that a diverse and inclusive learning environment is integral to achieving academic excellence. We recognize and value the experiences that diversity of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, family structure, age, and ability contribute to Giff Hill School.

Faculty and Staff

Goal

Attract and retain a superior faculty, staff, and administration who embrace the ideals of Giff Hill School by incorporating experiential learning across all grade levels and disciplines while nurturing our students' talents, sense of belonging, and unique identities.

Rationale

Giff Hill School is known for its creative and compassionate faculty members. The School must continue to attract and retain experienced and caring staff. We must provide the resources and opportunities necessary for professional growth, ensure an efficient and supportive work environment, and adequately compensate our staff so that they are able to reside in, and contribute to, the St. John community.

Implementation Steps

- Create a transparent salary scale that is competitive within the independent school environment.
- Develop protocols for teachers to apply for financial support for individual professional development including enrollment in specialized training, certification, and degree programs.
- Ensure that regularly scheduled, ongoing, mentoring and transition support is provided to new faculty by the campus principals.
- Identify and pursue whole faculty training on instructional techniques that enhance the school's ability to deliver an experiential education to all students.
- Create opportunities for faculty across campuses to get to know each other inside and outside of the classroom with the goal of enhancing collegial culture and school pride.

Students

Goal

Foster a culture of self-determination, empowerment, critical thinking, and holistic well-being among students, promoting pride in oneself, the school, and the community.

Rationale

By prioritizing self-determination, empowerment, critical thinking, and holistic well-being, we aim to equip our students with the necessary skills and mindset to navigate an ever-changing world. Cultivating a sense of pride in oneself, the school, and the community fosters a positive school climate and nurtures the overall development of our students.

Implementation Steps

- Implement policies and programs that emphasize human connection including the creation of a cell-phone-free campus.
- Design and implement advisory and mentoring structures that operationalize personal goal-setting, character education, and accountability for students at appropriate developmental levels throughout the school.
- Develop new systems for enhancing the role of the student council and the National Honor Society with the explicit goal of fostering school pride and a sense of student empowerment.
- Develop a more robust and sustainable program of after-school enrichment opportunities that foster critical thinking, school pride, and connection to the wider community of St. John.
- Review and update academic and character recognition programs to publically acknowledge students who demonstrate high achievement/high growth and who model pride in self and school.
- Formalize Barracuda Boosters Parent Association structures and functions to encourage a wider variety of parent participation in tasks ranging from event coordination and volunteer management to parent advisory committees and focus groups.
- Offer ongoing parent education opportunities to encourage parent involvement and improve parents' ability to effectively partner with the school in their children's success.

Curriculum/Program

Goals

Enhance curriculum and programs that set rigorous academic expectations within the framework of experiential learning and workforce development to prepare students for future success.

Rationale

In an ever-evolving professional landscape, equipping students with the practical skills, real-world experiences, and knowledge required to thrive in higher education and the workforce is essential. By emphasizing experiential learning and workforce development, our school can bridge the gap between college-readiness and practical application, empowering students to become confident, adaptable, college and career-ready individuals.

Implementation Steps

- Enhance the academic achievement of Giffit Hill School students in the area of mathematics while maintaining our strength in reading.
- Provide professional development which supports the design of interdisciplinary curriculum modules for every grade level that are based on experiential learning pedagogy, which we define as the integration of disciplines and application of knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems and achieve real-world outcomes using critical and creative thinking.
- Formalize and expand workforce development programs to include high school externships and post-high school registered apprenticeships to expose students to the diverse opportunities available locally and globally, and prepare students for future success.
- Formalize ELC-12 health standards that combine physical and social-emotional health and wellness, mindfulness, and the executive habits of successful students.

Governance

Goal

Maintain strong governance at Giffit Hill School. Build and evolve the Board's membership to meet the school's emerging challenges and fulfill its strategic plan.

Rationale

Giffit Hill School has experienced many transitions in our 45-year history. After several location and structural changes, the school has evolved into a distinctive independent school that can exemplify the principles and best practices of the National Association of Independent Schools.

Implementation Steps

- Make certain that the Board's primary work and focus are long-range and strategic, and that the Board sets and achieves goals through the work of the standing committees.
- Ensure that the Board's composition reflects the expertise, resources, and perspectives (past, present, and future) needed to fulfill the mission and strategic objectives of the school.
- Develop succession planning to ensure that as Trustees step down from the Board, new Trustees are in place to provide continuity in the full range of expertise, professions, community relations, and all the diverse qualities that strengthen the Board's abilities.
- Continue with improving and implementing a robust orientation process for new Trustees.
- Establish a process for transitioning the Board's most valued retiring members to Emeritus status. Develop agreement among the Board about the range of roles that should be offered to Emeritus members.

Advancement

Goal

Continue to expand the current Advancement Program to ensure the long-term financial security of Giffit Hill School by enhancing the school's visibility, cultivating broader support, and acknowledging possible future risks for Giffit Hill School.

Rationale

GHS depends on philanthropic support to ensure equitable access to the education we offer for students across the community regardless of financial background. With a small and young alumni base, a high percentage of students receiving financial aid, and few parents/grandparents who are in a position to help, GHS relies on the broader communities of the USVI and seasonal residents to meet the school's annual operating budget and to grow its endowment to ensure financial security in the future.

Implementation Steps

- Conduct a comprehensive campaign that maintains the annual fund, supports important capital improvements, and grows the endowment fund. The initial goal is to raise at least \$6 million over three years to support the Annual Fund, \$10 million to support Capital Projects, and \$4 million to enhance and improve the Endowment (initial goals may change over time). This campaign will include an increased focus on planned giving, alumni relations, special events, publications/communications, and grant funding.
- Share GHS's successes, its unique mission, and creative program offerings with new audiences, including locally-owned West Indian businesses, owners of economic development companies (EDCs), potential corporate sponsors, public officials, and new homeowners, through a variety of print and digital media publications and in-person events.
- Enhance the stewardship and cultivation of donors by formalizing an advancement calendar that includes individualized donor updates for donors with multi-year pledges.
- Focus on applications to federal and local institutions and charitable foundations for grants and awards that enhance the depth or scope of the GHS mission.

- Analyze future risks to current advancement strategies and formulate plans to mitigate those risks. Current concerns include:
 - an aging donor base, and changes in donor behavior as cultural influences shift and evolve
 - the impact of a local, national, or international financial crisis fueled by natural disasters, political/social unrest
 - global health trends that may alter travel patterns
 - increased competition for support amongst the 35 non-profits based in St. John
 - regulatory changes that impact tax laws related to charitable giving

Finance

Goal

Ensure and protect the long-term financial strength of Giff Hill School.

Rationale

As an independent school, GHS is dependent upon tuition, fees, facility use fees, and philanthropic support to provide an exceptional educational experience for our students. Execution of the strategic goals of this plan requires stewardship of the school's assets, prudent oversight of the financials, and the development of additional revenue streams.

Implementation Steps

- Strengthen the current endowment in order to defray expenses that are part of the annual operating budget.
- Communicate with financial advisors biannually to monitor the progress of our investments.
- Support and empower the financial aid committee to select tools and follow protocols that equitably and consistently assess each family's ability to contribute to their child's education while ensuring the school maintains the ability to meet demonstrated financial needs to the greatest extent possible.
- Determine a strategy for debt reduction, including negotiation with banks and vendors.
- Align item and account names in QuickBooks and the annual budget to enhance clarity in accounting and reporting.

Facilities

Goal

Ensure that the facilities of Giffit Hill School support the School's mission by providing safe, purpose-built physical spaces that enhance the educational experience and model environmentally sustainable building practices.

Design and construct an environmentally sensitive campus to house our middle and high school classrooms, and retrofit our lower school campus to increase efficiency and accommodate our growing student population.

Build or renovate spaces that help recruit and retain students, that are strong enough to withstand natural disasters in the forms of hurricanes and earthquakes, and that will continue to serve community needs for years to come.

Rationale

As the school approaches its 45th anniversary, it is essential we address the storm-hardening of our campuses to reduce deferred maintenance, enhance the learning environment to accommodate a growing student enrollment and new programs, and ensure Giffit Hill School will be well-equipped to serve the community for the next 50 years just as it has for the past 45.

Implementation Steps

- Complete a master plan for facilities that reflects the needs of the faculty, student body, and signature programs of GHS, while promoting green building practices and the conservation of resources.
- Construct environmentally sensitive classroom structures and convert the current upper school structure back to a multi-purpose facility with community-use priorities including athletics, workforce development, and business partnerships.
- Design and replace the lower campus Early Learning Center and main office with a concrete building that accommodates classrooms, offices, a kitchen, and outdoor garden spaces.
- Seek to develop the school's waterfront property in Fish Bay for marine education and the potential for aquaculture.

- Review the building maintenance plan and update it to include new facilities and/or eliminate old ones.

Community

Goal

Improve the community's understanding and perception of the mission and accomplishments of Giff Hill School.

Rationale

It is essential to create an inclusive and welcoming educational environment that celebrates diversity and breaks down barriers to access. By shifting the community's perception of our school from elite to accessible, and from predominantly white/transplant to a representative microcosm of St. John's racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity, we can attract a broader range of students and families, while fostering a sense of belonging and cultural appreciation among our existing community members.

Implementation Steps

- Engage with community organizations, religious institutions, and other community stakeholders to build partnerships and facilitate outreach efforts.
- Host community forums, workshops, and panel discussions to build community engagement and foster public-private partnerships and the sharing of community resources.
- Actively recruit and hire a diverse and culturally competent faculty and staff, and build the Board of Trustees to reflect a greater range of the diversity present within the St. John community.
- Build the support base for GHS among generational St. Johnian families, community leaders, and business owners.

Ratified by the GHS Board of Trustees on October 27, 2023.

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