



AUSTIN PREPARATORY SCHOOL

NOVEMBER 7, 2018

# MIDDLE SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRESS REPORT



---

**PREPARED BY**

MICHAEL MCLAUGHLIN - HEAD OF MIDDLE SCHOOL  
AUSTIN PREP MIDDLE SCHOOL FACULTY

# MIDDLE SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

## WHY START PLANNING NOW?

The 2018-2019 academic year marks an important juncture in the life of the current Middle School Strategic Plan. The plan “expires” in two years, so this year is a year to both take stock of where we’ve been and celebrate as well as to evaluate the progress of our initiatives and the work that remains. This evaluation and planning process also falls in line with the release of the Upper School Strategic Plan, allowing for conversations to happen about how Middle School contributes to the US Plan and how it reflects core documents like the Profile of the Graduate, Teacher, and Advisor.



## BACKGROUND: THE CREATION OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN VER. 2014

In the spring semester of 2014, Austin Prep embarked on the process of developing a Middle School Strategic Plan. The purpose of this project was to develop an inspirational middle school vision, employing the best practices associated with this unique age cohort, while emphasizing continuous progress, innovation, and expansion.

The process began with a day-long retreat engaging middle school faculty and administrators. The retreat was followed by the creation of a faculty survey, with multiple open and closed question formats aimed at identifying, very specifically, the middle school’s challenges and opportunities.

Four major areas emerged for the purposes of strategic planning:



**Identity, Core Values, and Distinguishing Characteristics**



**Professional Development of Faculty and Administration**



**Marketing, Public Relations, and Admissions**



**Academic Life and Student Development Opportunities**

# BACKGROUND: COMMITTEE “CHARGE FOR THE YEAR” 2014-2015

An ad hoc Middle School Strategic Plan Committee was created and charged with pursuing a goal for each of the four major areas of the Strategic Plan. Additionally, this ad hoc committee had a number of actionable items to investigate or create:



## Identity, Core Values, and Distinguishing Characteristics

### Goal

Create a middle school set of value documents – a vision statement, representing the middle school’s quintessential beliefs. These statements will be in concert with Austin Prep’s school-wide mission and core value statements.

### Actionable items

Spearhead the creation of a set of value-focused documents addressing vision, core beliefs, and distinguishing characteristics



## Professional Development of Faculty & Administration

### Goal

Develop a set of Standards for Excellence – Middle School core competencies that reflect the school’s mission and culture; establish a set of professional development guidelines; create a mentoring system among teachers.

### Actionable items

- Review and refine the professional development plan to update teaching standards and professional development requirements to result in a new 21st Century Professional Development Program for Teachers and Administration
- Develop a new statement that profiles the qualities of a successful Middle School teacher at Austin Prep.
- Introduce digital portfolios for teachers.
- Provide new forums for teachers to share success stories.
- Conduct in-service training at faculty meetings geared on themes and common issues surrounding the lives of pre and early adolescent learners.
- Establish standards for supervising faculty
- Build library for teachers
- Refine the basis of faculty and administrative professional review and evaluation

# BACKGROUND: COMMITTEE “CHARGE FOR THE YEAR” 2014-2015

An ad hoc Middle School Strategic Plan Committee was created and charged with pursuing a goal for each of the four major areas of the Strategic Plan. Additionally, this ad hoc committee had a number of actionable items to investigate or create:

3

## Marketing, Public Relations, and Admissions

Goal

Tell the Austin Prep story and promote the school through a broad range of media outlets – and evaluate those efforts.

Actionable  
items

- \* Coordinate a marketing and public relations summit:
  - SWOT Analysis
  - Develop tactical strategies to enhance the quality of marketing materials, review communication protocols, review outreach programs with feeder schools
- \* Conduct exit interviews with families who leave prior to commencement
- \* Communicate with state and national associations in better understanding demographic shifts and the current market as well as strategies used in the most thriving schools

4

## Academic Life and Student Development Opportunities

Goal

Enrich the life of teachers and students with programs that scale innovation; develop an interdisciplinary approach to learning; energize the community around a culture of inquiry; provide the middle school with dedicated leadership in the form of a Middle School Head.

Actionable  
items

- Facilitate conversation with each department to create a set of cutting-edge educational programs that can be rolled out over time and will complement the current core curriculum
- Refine and expand the advising and counseling functions in the Middle School
- Develop opportunities for cross-over meetings between middle and upper school faculty and students
- Creation of a Parent-Teacher Advisory Committee



# BACKGROUND

## COMMITTEE DELIVERABLES, 2014-2015

Each department responded to a series of questions about their current offerings of curricular and co-curricular programming and posed ideas about future programming for consideration in line with advancing the MS Strategic Plan.

### DOCUMENTS:

- MS Identity and Distinguishing Characteristics
- MS Vision Statement
- Guiding Principles Statement
- MS Community Values
- Advisory Document
- Framework for Professional Development

## IMPLEMENTATION YEAR 1: 2015 - 2016

To marshal the implementation of the Middle School Strategic Plan, Austin Prep created a Division Head (DH) for the Middle School. The DH moved the location of several classrooms to create a more dedicated Middle School space and installed appliques to designate the MS wing. More than a physical separation, a new course catalog separated the MS and US offerings. The MS catalog adopted new language about courses and departmental philosophies reflective of Austin's understanding of MS learners. A Middle School counselor also came aboard to advance the social-emotional learning and development of Middle School students.

A television Readerboard and bulletin boards created spaces to tell the MS story and promote MS identity to the students. The DH also became heavily involved in Admissions, corresponding with prospective families. The DH linked Austin Prep with the Independent Schools Cultural Alliance. A Strategic Plan Implementation Committee met to develop several initiatives pertaining to creating a distinct MS culture: all-MS summer reading, orientation program, and Student Life initiatives (i.e. revamped Student Council).

Academic planning took place, primarily in the Humanities, for changes for the '16-'17 year to include:

- A 3-year roll-out of a revised Social Studies scope and sequence
- Realignment of the MS English curriculum around the three core values
- Pilot electives in the Department of Art and Design
- Introduction of Mandarin
- Cohort model for sixth grade English, History, and Theology.

At the end of the year, faculty and advisors were reassigned to minimize division cross over and create a more dedicated MS team that understood MS learners and pedagogy.



# BACKGROUND

## IMPLEMENTATION YEAR 2, 2016 - 2017

Two and a half years of meetings, planning, and preparation came to fruition with the implementation of a number of programs, specifically the items explored under the direction of the MS DH. Social studies began the first year of its phased redesign with grade 6, highlighted by the Egyptian Museum. Electives were piloted in the Department of Art and Design, moving away from the 6/art, 7/music, 8/drama model in previous years. A "Technology Toolbox" class was piloted for new incoming students. Special Middle School events were introduced including the Seventh Grade May Tea and Middle School Luau. In the second half of the year, there was a move towards technology-free lunch. The second half of the year also saw the formation of the Artis Senior Living Service Program, an example of a partnership in the community for students to apply the lessons learned on campus in direct service to others. To further the MS identity and experience, the MS met separately during several Community Meetings, a move which the US adopted in 2017-18 in the form of Class Congresses.

## IMPLEMENTATION YEAR 3, 2017 - 2018

Austin Prep introduced its revised mission statement this year "to inspire hearts to unite, minds to inquire, and hands to serve." The new schedule increased the frequency of advisory interactions and deepened the role of the advisor. This schedule also changed club offerings and introduced structured study halls in the Middle School. Offerings in the Department of Art and Design were expanded to include electives in music and art history. The second phase of the Social Studies redesign was launched with the Comparative Cultures Course. Preparations were made to adopt a new Theology curriculum through the Sophia Institute Press. A Study Skills course was introduced aimed at providing additional assistance for select students. Austin's Middle School joined the New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS) and even had faculty present at the annual conference.



# TAKING STOCK: AUTUMN, 2018

The third phase of the Social Studies redesign was launched with Civics. A focus on hands-on, experiential learning was promoted in Quarter 1 (and will be again in Quarter 4) of Civics as well as in the seventh grade Theology course through small-group field trips. The MS Science classes were moved to the fourth floor in the midst of the Upper School labs with the intention of promoting student curiosity about the sciences and engagement with US students. The new Dining Hall should be offered to potentially deepen community.

In late October, the Middle School faculty participated in a two-hour retreat exercise to celebrate progress over the past three years, examine the guiding principles and values document, and take a closer look at changes in the Middle School including Advisory, Student Life, Art and Design, Theology, and the 8th Grade Civics Course. A major outcome from the experience was to rework the Vision documents and be more intentional about using the language from those documents in evaluation and planning of programming and conversations about the Middle School. The afternoon generated a list of objectives for the remainder of the 2018-2019 year to move forward in implementing and evaluating the current Middle School Strategic Plan and to position ourselves to better write the next Middle School Strategic Plan in the 2019-2020 academic year.