

The Strategic Plan for St. Johnsbury Academy:

A Commitment to “Transmit the School Not Less But Greater and More Beautiful” to Future Generations

Heritage

Guided by its mission and vision, St. Johnsbury Academy undertakes this plan to sustain and enhance the School’s success in preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. Fulfilling this vision will require imagination, wisdom, hard work, and significant resources. We will need to remain good and faithful stewards of the School’s mission and resources, develop new resources and opportunities for excellence, and remain committed to meeting the needs of each student, current and future.

In 1842, the Fairbanks brothers envisioned a school that would give its students, primarily from the St. Johnsbury area, the education needed for success in the new industrial age. This education aimed not only to develop the acquisition of essential knowledge but also to cultivate habits of mind and heart, recognizing that knowledge without thoughtfulness and good character leads to selfish arrogance and uninformed citizens make for a weak democracy. Thaddeus Fairbanks, in particular, by adopting the Academy as his principal charity, saw in it the chance to embrace and support the democratic and noble moral ideals upon which this country was founded. By keeping tuition low enough for any qualified student to attend and embracing the educational vision that became the common school, Thaddeus led his generation in providing equal access to excellence—in education, citizenship, and opportunity.

Mission Statement

This is the mission of St. Johnsbury Academy, a diverse, comprehensive, and independent educational community grounded by our traditions, our deep optimism regarding young people, and our commitment to academic excellence:

- Character:** To teach good character by modeling and fostering compassion, respect, responsibility, and integrity
- Inquiry:** To foster a love for learning by engaging individuals in the pursuit of knowledge, creativity, and intellectual self-reliance
- Community:** To encourage each individual to understand his or her relationships, rights and responsibilities within a community that is itself part of the larger world

Core Values

Optimism regarding the Potential of Each Person

St. Johnsbury Academy believes that young people have the potential to do great things, that they have gifts and talents—some of which have gone unrecognized or unused—and that by helping each student recognize and use these gifts, teachers can help all students achieve their own unique brands of excellence, thereby transforming their own lives while changing the world around them. The Academy treasures the spirit of young people—their energy, their creativity, their compassion and generosity—as well as the unique spirit of each student, believing in them even when they don't believe in themselves. Therefore, the Academy remains committed to providing every reasonable opportunity for every student to succeed, proactively and empathetically encouraging each one to be resilient, and providing the supports and resources needed to do so.

High Aspirations for All

The only trait that a young person or employee needs to succeed at St. Johnsbury Academy is the desire to be great; from the beginning, the Academy has cultivated a culture of high aspirations. Setting and maintaining high standards for performance and decorum, expecting the best from each person, and believing that no one was created to be or feel mediocre, the Academy community has often challenged its members to succeed beyond their previous expectations. The Academy will continue to perfect its standards-based curriculum and methods of student-centered instruction, making every effort to adapt to the needs of each learner while preserving its high standards for performance. In the same way, the Academy will continue to expect excellence from each member of the faculty and staff and provide the necessary professional development for them to meet the needs of our students.

Comprehensive Curriculum

As secondary schools have taken on an expanded role in American culture, providing not only a liberal arts education but also education in the trades and technology, St. Johnsbury Academy has embraced this comprehensive model of the American high school. Unlike most public high schools and virtually all other independent schools, the Academy has made its art programs and technical education programs part of its regular curriculum. Furthermore, unlike most independent schools, the Academy enrolls students of varying abilities and socio-economic groups, as well as ethnicities and nationalities. Through its comprehensive and innovative curriculum, all students, regardless of their interests, talents, or backgrounds, are able to find a course of study at the Academy in which they can excel. We will remain committed to providing the best facilities, equipment, technology, faculty, and instructional practices to make all programs of outstanding quality and equally accessible to students.

Diverse and Dynamic Community

The Academy has always enjoyed a close-knit community. Located in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, it has benefited from the goodwill, communal pride, and neighborliness that have historically characterized this beautiful part of the world. Within the school, this community is fostered through the development of close personal relationships. Beyond the walls of the school, Academy students and faculty and staff help build community in many ways: community service and Capstone projects, volunteer membership and leadership of local organizations, and outreach efforts like Community of Concern and summer programs. To maintain the closeness within its walls, the Academy is committed to small classes and an active advisory program; to maintain close relationships with its local communities, the Academy will continue to look for ways to use its resources to improve the lives of local youth and their families.

Tradition of Respect

From the beginning, when James Colby sat in front of his first class of students in 1842, the Academy has fostered respect as the foundation of its traditions and school culture. The day begins with Chapel, a community-wide gathering marked by a decorum and civility uncommon in American education. Our dress code continues to be a means of expressing our respect for ourselves, for each other, and for the important work that we do. Even our lively celebrations of LI Weekend and Winter Carnival are governed by respect for friends and opponents alike. Our Commencement Exercises are noted for their respectful and dignified tone. All of these outward shows of respect are simply the expressions of the culture of tolerance and understanding that marks our diverse community—of young people and adults who come together despite enormous differences in race, origin, culture, interests, skills, and family resources—a community of artists and athletes, engineers and entrepreneurs, scholars and skilled craftsmen. Therefore, the Academy will continue to respect ourselves, our environment, our community, and our work by being better stewards, creating healthy environments, and seek to meet the needs of all, regardless of differences.

Independence

Underlying our mission and all of its associated core values is the realization that we are only able to live them out as long as we remain independent. The Academy has been the leader in defending the independence of the New England town academy from the efforts of federal and state governments to control our curriculum, standards, and finances. Our independence allows us to deliver an outstanding product while controlling its cost to our families and communities. Free from the vagaries of politics and educational fads, the Academy is able to focus on its core business: educating young people for successful and happy lives in a changing and challenging world. Therefore, we will continue efforts to keep legislators informed of the value of this unique model for education—a private school with a public mission—an independent school conscious of its interdependence with the local community—and do all we can to thwart efforts to erode it.

The Goals

- **The Academy will provide each of its students with the opportunities and support needed to be successful communicators, problem-solvers, citizens, and scholars.**

Each young person, regardless of background, interests, or learning style, should be encouraged to dream big. The Academy's standards for communication, problem-solving, citizenship, and essential knowledge set high expectations for what young people should be like, know, and be able to do as they leave high school. While we recognize that some students will not be able to meet these standards in four years, we believe that this number should be small, smaller than it is now, and that to have any other goal than helping each student meet these expectations is unacceptable.

To accomplish this goal, we need to make sure that each student is safe and healthy. We will need to continually monitor and improve our security infrastructure, our health care (both physical and emotional) infrastructure, our housing arrangements, and our food service. We already have superior safety officers, counselors, and nurses, but we need to provide them with more up-to-date equipment and facilities in order to better serve our students. Likewise, we have made significant improvements in the delivery and quality of our food service and have begun, with the addition of our new dorm, to move to a family-centered, house-based model for residential life.

We also need to recognize that, given our mission, we will always have one of the most diverse student bodies in the world. We enroll students from the full range of socio-economic, ethnic, and academic ability groups. To meet the various learning needs of these students, we remain committed to a student-centered approach to teaching, recognizing that it is our responsibility to determine how each student learns best and then adapt our delivery of instruction to maximize his or her performance. We will need to adapt not only our lessons and units, but also our daily and yearly schedule, in order for more students to meet our standards and for each student to reach his or her fullest potential.

Along with this individualized approach to instruction, we remain committed to offering a comprehensive curriculum, providing our students with excellent courses in technical, artistic, and academic disciplines. These courses need to be equally outstanding in quality and value across the curriculum, and therefore, we need to provide the equipment, materials, and technology required to ensure state-of-the-art education for all. Likewise, we will continue to view our curriculum as a combination of experiences inside and outside of the classroom, including travel study, leadership training, community service, after-school programs, career internships, and multicultural studies. By providing such a range of opportunities for excellence, we will allow each of our students to find his or her passion and pursue it, building on strengths while shoring up weaknesses, becoming ready for the world of college, work, and citizenship.

Every young person who aspires to such excellence should have the opportunity to attend the Academy, regardless of family circumstance. Rather than allowing only the wealthy or only those fortunate enough to have school choice to attend our school, we need to provide all those who aspire to greatness and all those who embrace our mission to have access to an Academy education. Our diversity makes us a stronger and richer community, and it prepares our students for the world they will encounter after high school. To accomplish this, we will need to establish an endowment for financial aid, and as we seek to strengthen our sense of family, we will be especially sensitive to requests for the children of current and former Academy families, alumni, faculty, and staff.

- **Academy students will be served by a talented, collaborative, and supportive faculty and staff, all of whom are expertly trained and committed to help each student pursue a personally relevant education.**

We have always been justifiably proud of our faculty and staff, and alumni from every decade recount the myriad ways in which a constellation of stellar teachers and mentors have inspired and guided their lives. Therefore, we are committed to making sure that the future generations of Academy students are served by a faculty and staff that rises to the standards set by those legendary figures of the past. To do so, we will need to establish an evaluation system that encourages and rewards innovation, collaboration, love of students, love of learning, and continued professional development in the service of outstanding teaching.

Likewise, we will need to maintain a competitive and innovative compensation program that raises our teachers' salaries closer to what is being offered by our peer schools and in the public sector. Our average teacher salary is less than that of peer schools such as Kimball Union, Holderness, and Burr and Burton. Especially as we attract more teachers with advanced professional degrees, we will need to compete with private industry for their services, especially in math and science. One way to become more competitive in this area is to provide our faculty and staff with facilities and technology that are not only up-to-date, but also support their efforts to be innovative and collaborative—exploring cross-curricular initiatives—engage students, and build community. Another way is to look beyond salary toward health benefits and retirement programs, improved and expanded housing options, and stipends for research and/or travel study. In the same way that no student should choose another school because it offers more financial aid or superior facilities, no prospective faculty member should choose to work someplace else because the pay is more competitive or the facilities and technology more up-to-date.

- **The Academy will create an exemplary and sustainable financial structure that enables us to be good stewards of our resources year-over-year and generation-over-generation.**

Just as we desire to ensure that each generation of Academy students is served by a faculty and staff just as excellent as those in years past, we need to make sure that the school has the financial resources to provide for the programs, facilities, and people

mentioned above. To do so, we will need to establish several endowed funds: for financial aid, deferred maintenance, technology improvements, endowed chairs, environmental stewardship, and professional development, for example. Our endowment lags behind many independent schools. It is less than Putney's endowment, and it is one-half of that of Holderness. We want to make sure our students enjoy the benefits that their peers do at other boarding schools and the best funded public and private day schools. Currently, we struggle to provide the same opportunities that our competitors do at a reasonable and affordable price.

We have long boasted of the generosity of our alumni, friends, and benefactors and of the long tradition of those who come before providing for those who come after. To sustain this tradition, we will need to identify and engage new donors and build relationships with those who can generously donate their time and talents in service of our mission. Thus, we will need to strengthen our advancement efforts, not only to remain connected to our increasingly active alumni body, but also to successfully approach foundations and other benefactors, market the school more effectively throughout the world, and explore new markets and cultivate new benefactors. Part of this effort will be to enhance our relationships with families, alumni, friends, and community members, all of whom play an important role in generating good will and positive public relations on behalf of the Academy. We hope these efforts will lead to greater support for the Academy, allowing us to expand opportunities for young people and reduce our dependence on tuition revenue.

All of these efforts, as well as auxiliary programs such as summer institutes and camps, adult education, and creative uses of facilities, will help the Academy to become more financially stable, able to invest wisely, and able to responsibly manage its resources. We will need to establish a long-range financial model that will guide our budgetary growth and decision-making, helping us generate more resources as well as contain costs.

This plan is sweeping in its goals and summary in its scope. It has to be. The Academy has historically served a community of constituencies that is more diverse than that of any other independent school. This plan allows such service to continue. A school created, nurtured, and loved by its local communities, enriched and transformed by its boarding program, and supported by the generosity of its friends and alumni, the Academy is a vibrant and healthy school, ready to step confidently into a new era of its history.

This plan is bold and visionary, but such is the history of the Academy. Inspired by its vision and by the conversations that have helped create it, there is a fresh energy surrounding this plan, and all those involved in creating it have shared the same commitment to future generations of Academy students: a commitment to offer our students the best education possible and a pledge to, as my predecessor Stanley Oldham pledged over 60 years ago, "transmit this school not less but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us."