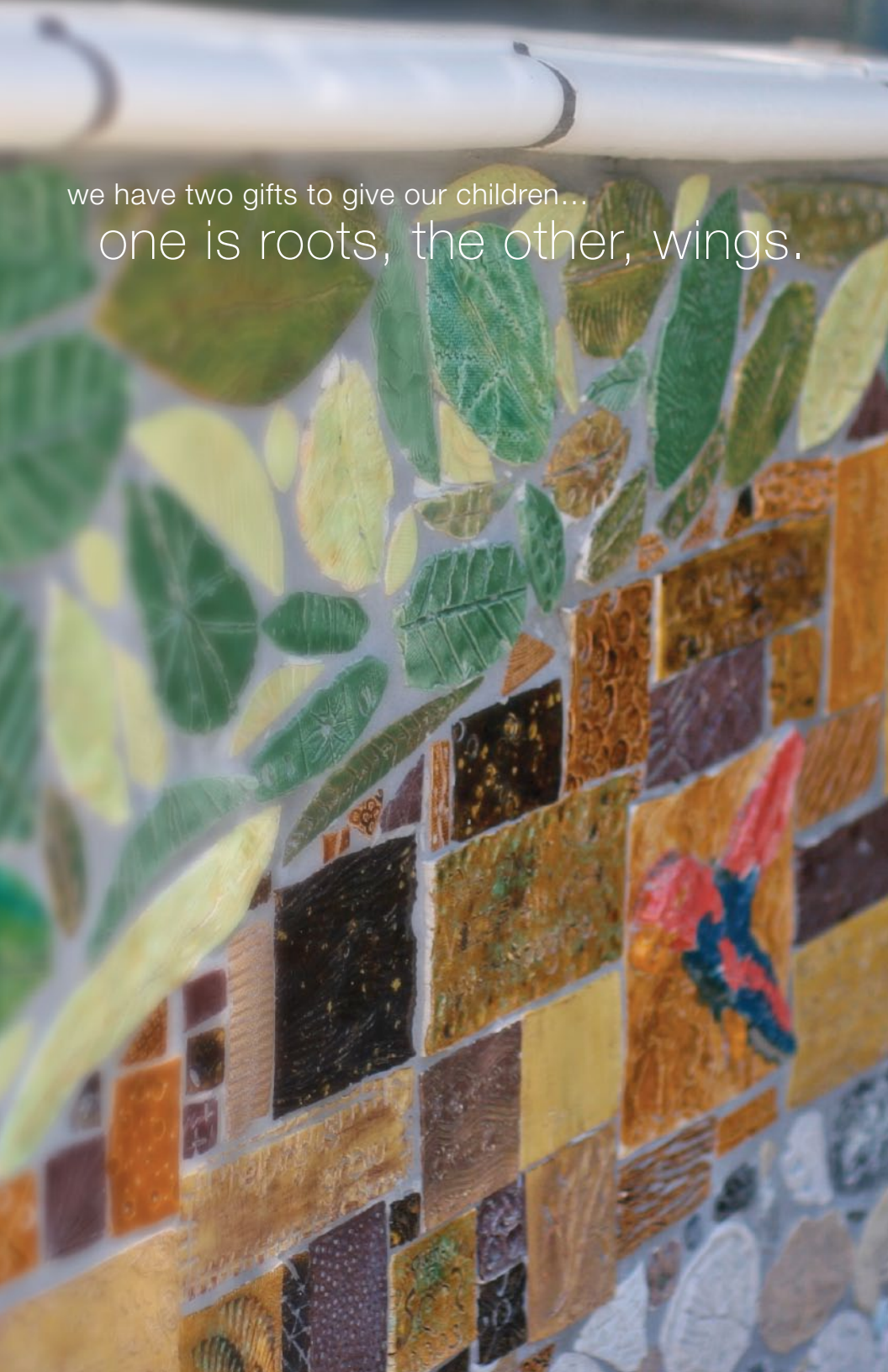


Sustaining the Vision:

# THE STRATEGIC PLAN



JANUARY 2009



we have two gifts to give our children...  
one is roots, the other, wings.



To the Echo Horizon School Community,

Last year, the Board of Trustees formed a committee to develop a Strategic Plan for the school. Composed of current and alumni parents, teachers, and administrators, the committee met throughout the year. We examined the school's strengths and weaknesses and researched core elements of the school's operation. We analyzed extensive financial and demographic data, as well as educational trends and issues. These explorations led us to a framework for discussion.

We sought input from the school's key constituency groups in a series of ways. We met with faculty, parents, and students. Their perspectives helped us to frame the key issues that affect the school's evolution. Our parent Town Hall meeting in February yielded a range of tactical, as well as strategic recommendations. We discussed each element of the school's fabric, including philosophy, program, teachers, administration, facility, fundraising, and culture. We facilitated discussions in each grade and were impressed by the thoughtful ideas contributed by students as they assessed the school's operations. We followed up with an online survey and suggestion box at the front of the school, which allowed for a less filtered (and anonymous) means of commenting on the most pressing questions of our study.

The intensive year-long process enabled us to thoroughly research internal issues, gather feedback, and examine external forces that might impact the school going forward. It allowed us to identify the areas that are core to our reputation, operation, and success. The plan we have shaped with your input will help the Board to guide the school in the future. Our recommendations direct the school to positive change in the near-term and allow it to reach its greatest potential in the long-run.

Overall, the school's quality of education is superb and the faculty is well-respected. Our position among our peers is excellent and our tuition is competitive in the mid-range for our region. Echo Horizon School is healthy and stable, but there are ways that we can improve. This plan outlines a number of ways we can proactively approach current and future challenges.

We hope that you will read through this plan and join us in working toward success on each of our goal areas.

Richard Hull and Nora Wendel  
*Co-chairs, Strategic Planning Committee*

## Strategic Planning Committee Members

### CO-CHAIRS:

Richard Hull, TRUSTEE

Nora Wendel, TRUSTEE

Carly Alsbach, ECHO CENTER TEACHER

John Crabtree-Ireland, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

Paula Dashiell, HEAD OF SCHOOL

Ellis Enlow, TEACHER

Vicki Ishida, ECHO CENTER DIRECTOR

Deborah Nordman, TRUSTEE

Robert Palmer, PARENT

Alvin Pittman, ALUMNI PARENT

Lance Rosenzweig, TRUSTEE

Patti Rowey, PARENT

Susie Sayer, BUSINESS MANAGER

Ivonne Silver, TRUSTEE



## Mission Statement

The mission of Echo Horizon School is to educate hearing and deaf and hard of hearing children in an inclusive environment in which self-reliance and mutual respect are valued and encouraged. The curriculum is designed to be challenging and developmentally appropriate for each learner.

## Core Values

At Echo Horizon School, we value:

### MUTUAL RESPECT

- ▶ Listening to and learning from the ideas of others, even if they conflict with one's own notions
- ▶ When disagreeing, doing so agreeably
- ▶ Treating everyone - students, teachers, other members of the school community and the community at large - with kindness and consideration
- ▶ Collaborating in our learning and teaching
- ▶ Emphasizing the positive and supporting others as they pursue their goals

### INCLUSIVENESS

- ▶ Embracing diversity as an opportunity to learn about what makes us all human
- ▶ Understanding that all students have unique talents and contributions
- ▶ Fostering a sense of kinship among all members of the community
- ▶ Ensuring that every student, regardless of individual gifts and needs, has the opportunity to learn the concepts and skills that he or she is next ready to learn

### SELF-RELIANCE

- ▶ Assuming responsibility for learning, as well as for interpersonal relationships
- ▶ Taking the initiative to solve problems
- ▶ Persevering when faced with obstacles

### THE BEST EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

- ▶ Evaluating the latest educational research so that the faculty and administration continue their professional development
- ▶ Maintaining a curriculum that flows seamlessly from grade to grade and adheres to a consistent philosophical approach

## Philosophy

Each child is unique. Children learn at varying paces with spurts, jumps and lulls at different points. Although we group children by grades, this is more in terms of social-emotional growth than academic skill or readiness. We use an individualized approach to instruction with the belief that instruction should be geared to the concept or skill that the child is next ready to learn. Instruction and practice should be at the right level of difficulty so that the child feels both challenged and successful.

In order to feel competent, a child must not only feel successful but also feel somewhat in charge. Therefore much emphasis is placed on developing independence in the child. In the classroom we provide the child with opportunities to make choices and decisions, while teaching the criteria for making those choices and decisions productive ones.

## Educational Goals

- ▶ Students will develop the academic tools, social skills, and moral integrity needed to be successful in their next phase of education.
- ▶ Students will integrate themselves successfully, making contributions to a diverse society, while maintaining individuality and respect for others.
- ▶ Students will generate a variety of solutions and approaches to situations requiring thoughtful and creative problem solving.
- ▶ Students will develop the skills and positive attitude for engaging in learning as a lifelong process

## Diversity and Inclusion

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing and honoring our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, marital status or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.



## The Strategic Plan

### I. SUSTAINABILITY

**Strategic Goal:** Identify and integrate best and leading edge practices regarding environmental, financial, demographic, and programmatic sustainability throughout school operations.

The Strategic Planning Committee identified sustainability as an overarching theme to many of the goals and objectives in the Strategic Plan. All operational systems of the school must be healthy and viable, as all of these strands are interconnected. The committee believes that the school must use best practices to develop and sustain financial efficiency and cost-effectiveness, demographic diversity and inclusivity, and curricular development of skills and values so that our students can contribute meaningfully to a global society. Each of these areas will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections.

One of the most pressing issues of our day is environmental sustainability - the need to protect our planet's fragile balance and finite resources. The committee feels that the school has a moral obligation, both as an educational institution and as a member of the global society, to seek out and implement school practices that serve this need. This is a broad task, including examining our use of energy and consumables in the classroom and school facility. It requires that we evaluate the impact of our daily actions on our immediate, school environment, as well as on the larger, global environment. Although the science and information relevant to these decisions continues to grow, we cannot wait until all the answers are crystal clear. We must use our best efforts to evaluate current information and to prioritize our actions. Just as we aim to develop students who are lifelong learners, the implementation of this goal will require an on-going evaluation of our efforts in light of what will certainly be new information in the future.

The school has already begun to look seriously at our environmental sustainability practices. The Parent Association, administration, sustainability coordinator, faculty, and staff are actively working to examine the school's operations and to support and develop the school's efforts in this regard. One small step in this process has been the shift toward greater use of technology for school communications.

It is imperative that we incorporate environmental sustainability into the curriculum. We must help our students to think critically, creatively, and collaboratively about these issues. During the strategic planning process, it was encouraging to hear so many students voice their desire for environmentally responsible school practices.

**Objectives:**

- a) Assimilate these concepts within the educational curriculum and administrative operations of the school.
- b) Investigate and implement ways to manage our facilities in the most sustainable and efficient manner.
- c) Develop education and involvement opportunities for all constituencies in these efforts.
- d) Leverage technology to make the school more effective and efficient emphasizing web and electronic communications.

**II. PROGRAM AND SERVICES**

**Strategic Goal:** Advance Echo Horizon School's role as a leading edge institution educating hearing and deaf and hard of hearing children through an evolving and forward-thinking curriculum rooted in best educational practices.

Echo Horizon School has much to be proud of in the high-quality education it provides its students. The school, in conjunction with the Echo Center, is a national leader in educating hearing and deaf and hard of hearing children in an inclusive environment. All children at Echo Horizon School participate in the same high-quality curriculum rooted in best educational practices. EHS serves as a model for other programs across the country that aspire to offer similar services. The school recently received the prestigious Leading Edge honor for demographic sustainability from the National Association of Independent Schools.

We must continue to be proactive in evaluating and identifying educational trends and issues that we wish to incorporate into our curriculum. Many of these will be tied to concepts of interconnectedness and to our growing awareness of the impact of our actions on others, on ourselves, and on the planet. For example, place-based learning helps students to feel connected to their immediate world as they learn in the context of their local community. Global awareness and appreciation for diversity help students to understand and value their connection to and place in the broader world. Ecological literacy enables students to further understand the impact of human actions on our environment. Mindful awareness practices help students focus their attention and develop self-awareness and knowledge of self.



The faculty and administration have begun to incorporate some of these objectives into the curriculum. Curriculum review must be ongoing and will undoubtedly reveal other trends and issues.

Some of the most impassioned discussion among parent constituents during the strategic planning process related to the school's program and services. At the Town Hall Meeting, there was both praise for and constructive criticism of our curriculum. While many parents were satisfied that we "walked the talk," others offered suggestions and sought reassurance on a variety of issues. The far-ranging discussion covered both strategic and operational issues. The strategic planning committee carefully reviewed the Town Hall Meeting feedback, as well as the results of the online survey, and this feedback informed the committee's strategic goals. There is a need for improved communication with parent constituents on issues relating to philosophy and curriculum.

Throughout the strategic planning process, the school's technology program received accolades from all constituents. In order to maintain our leadership position in this rapidly changing field, the school must stay abreast of relevant technological advances and explore innovative ways to use technology to enhance our curriculum. The school should also investigate the feasibility of providing specialized support services to our deaf and hard of hearing graduates who are in middle school.

**Objectives:**

- a) Evaluate opportunities to refine the curriculum by integrating place-based learning, global awareness, appreciation for diversity, information literacy, ecological literacy, and mindful awareness into the program.
- b) Maintain our leadership position in technology in support of our curriculum, especially in areas such as global awareness and the development of skills that are needed in the 21st Century.
- c) Expand our curriculum review process striving continually to identify, understand and address current and future trends and issues, as well as constituent questions and concerns.
- d) Expand parent education to include educational philosophy and curriculum development and to address parental questions, ideas, and concerns.
- e) Investigate extending speech and language auditory services to deaf and hard of hearing graduates recognizing that there are limited academic and social services available to them in local public and independent middle schools.

### III. FACULTY AND STAFF

**Strategic Goal:** Preserve our superior faculty and teaching excellence.

Echo Horizon School has an excellent faculty and staff. Parents rate the faculty as the most important factor in what makes EHS unique, students “like them,” and teachers respect their peers. The staff serves as the backbone for the operations and is a wonderful asset to the school. The faculty successfully integrates the school’s mission, values, philosophy, and goals into the daily curriculum. Faculty tenure is an additional strength and enables new teachers to learn from their more experienced peers.

The school invests significantly in its faculty and staff, including providing competitive salaries and benefits, as well as offering training, ongoing professional development, and mentoring. These programs are key contributors to the overall high quality of instruction. Additionally, best educational practices, including Madeline Hunter’s methodology, are continually reinforced. It is imperative that this excellence be maintained and that the school continues its investment in faculty and staff.

The school must also be vigilant to the need for changes in the composition of the staff, ensuring that the right resources are in place to sustain our excellence.

**Objectives:**

- a) Maintain competitive salary and benefits packages to ensure that the school continues to attract and retain quality teachers.
- b) Seek out, evaluate, and provide the highest level of professional development opportunities for our faculty and staff.
- c) Continue to assess the benefits of and our needs for additional staff and faculty resources relative to additional costs incurred.
- d) Sustain our emphasis on best educational practices that embrace all aspects of a child’s development through continued use of the Madeline Hunter methodology.



### IV. FINANCE

**Strategic Goal:** Ensure the long-term financial security and vitality of the school.

Through careful Board oversight and administrative management, the school has maintained financial stability and health since its earliest years. Even through this latest economic downturn, the school has managed to minimize its losses, remain on a solid footing, and continue with its quality educational program. Its investment portfolio has been conservatively positioned to be well-protected over the long term. It will be important to continue this conservative approach, while planning for possible long-term financial priorities as they develop.

The school has diligently developed a strong fundraising program, while maintaining a culture of low-key solicitation. It has also steadily built up its reserves, providing a pool of assets that would function as a safety net in case of financial crisis. Non-tuition income for the school consists of charitable gifts and income from investments. While maintaining its respectful fundraising culture, the school needs to further develop its major gifts program and increase foundation and corporate solicitations. Showcasing the unique nature of the Echo Center partnership provides an opportunity for these types of larger gifts to sustain the program. EHS has the opportunity to get creative with its proposals for funding.

The Financial Aid program has been able to grow in part as a result of the fundraising efforts mentioned above. As well, and in an effort to maintain socioeconomic diversity in the school community, EHS assists families who demonstrate a need for reduced tuition. The admissions process is not informed by aid requests and the school firmly believes that it must work with its families to keep the program financially accessible.

The school must continue to develop ties to the extended donor base of alumni, grandparents, and community members, while maintaining cost-effectiveness and efficiency. It will be wise to continue adding to its reserves, in order to ensure the school’s long-term stability. This goes hand-in-hand with a site plan anticipating future facility needs. We recommend increasing the amount of financial aid and granting it to more students, in order to meet families where the need is greatest.

The school needs to maintain a transparency that allows its constituents to understand its operations and plans for the future.

**Objectives:**

- a) Explore all available methods to build a strong long-term asset base.
- b) Actively investigate expansion of non-tuition income, and asset accumulation, without impacting our culture and diversity through a coordinated series of initiatives, such as the self-funding of the Echo Center program, continuing to develop a soft culture of giving, launching a series of endowment funds, and increasing our outreach to alumni.
- c) Increase tuition assistance both in terms of the overall amount and the number of families receiving assistance.
- d) Develop a long-term facility and site strategy and plan.
- e) Create a culture of transparency relative to financial matters through consistent, regular, and open communications with key school constituents.

**V. DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY**

**Strategic Goal:** Integrate and expand current initiatives to become an institution more reflective of the community and society in which we live.

Due to the unique nature of the Echo Center and the school's mission, our enrollment has always consisted of a mix of hearing and deaf and hard of hearing students. Using this model, EHS has maintained an inclusive community in which everyone can feel welcome and connected, regardless of ability, age, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status. This effort has strands that extend through admissions, curriculum, hiring, and teaching and it touches all of our school constituencies.

In 2007, motivated by goals in our previous strategic plan, the Board engaged our constituencies to evaluate the school using the Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism (AIM) tool, developed by the National Association of Independent Schools. The AIM process yielded specific initiatives that the school has been implementing. It has aided our accreditation self-study and strategic planning. The school will continue its work to integrate and extend the AIM initiatives into the life of the school.

EHS has strong ties to the immediate community surrounding the school. It is involved in civic life, actively supports local businesses, and participates in the efforts of a number of fellow non-profit organizations. It has long observed the guidelines



of its Conditional Use Permit, which governs how the operation impacts and integrates with the neighborhood. Efforts are on-going to deepen its roots and offer value to the community.

As we continue to evolve as a school community, EHS must commit to look inward, as well as outward. It must work to reflect the diversity of the larger community and actively share and celebrate our story of inclusion.

**Objectives:**

- a) Integrate the school's newly formed definition of diversity into school publications and other constituency communication efforts.
- b) Finalize and implement the initiatives inaugurated through the AIM program:
  - Examine and affect admissions practices with an eye to expanding our reach.
  - Review and affect curriculum with the intent to integrate increased exposure to various cultures and points of view. Establish a coherent and comprehensive approach across grade levels.
  - Examine and affect current hiring practices with an eye to increasing the diversity of administrators, teachers, and staff.
  - Provide training for all constituencies with regard to diversity and inclusiveness.
- c) Deepen our community involvement beyond existing efforts to be seen as a "good neighbor" to include opportunities for local community members to take advantage of school offerings.
- d) Continue to seek out and evaluate transportation issues and solutions to reduce environmental and neighborhood traffic impacts.

## VI. GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

**Strategic Goal:** Provide for continued strong, effective governance and administrative leadership in the future.

The school is strong, in part, due to a continuity of leadership in both the administration and the Board that has lasted for over two decades. In order to sustain its strength through any change in leadership, the school must make plans for those changes. Planning must include developing succession plans for administrative and Board leadership, as well as implementing processes and procedures to guide the school through any transition.

The Strategic Planning Committee recommends that the school implement an ongoing strategic planning process, replacing the periodic intensive review. This change will allow the school to address tactical and strategic needs more nimbly and adjust strategy as conditions shift. It will allow the school to identify and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, implement initiatives, and plan strategically for the future. This model reflects current practices in the corporate world, which has adapted to rapid change.

### **Objectives:**

- a) Establish a standing Planning and Strategy committee on the Board of Trustees to provide for ongoing information gathering, issues analysis, and long-range planning.
- b) Build resources, infrastructure, and processes that will enable the school to succeed in the future independent of any specific individual(s).
- c) Develop succession plans that ensure continuity of effective administrative leadership in the future.
- d) Develop succession plans that ensure continuity of effective Board leadership in the future.







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