



**BLUE OAK SCHOOL
STRATEGIC AGENDA**

May 5, 2011

Blue Oak School

Strategic Agenda 2011

Introduction:

Blue Oak School's existence spans the first decade of the twenty-first century. As we enter the second decade, building on a great foundation, a yet bolder vision will meet new needs. The school was founded to prepare students for this century, and to do so by focusing on the unique potential of each child within the framework of a progressive community that values collaboration and character. The school, in turn, continues to see itself as an integral part of the surrounding Napa community, emphasizes the importance of diversity in its many forms, and values the inclusion of parents as part of the educational enterprise.

Because the pace and characteristics of educational change require dexterity and energy, Blue Oak continues to scan the world, both for signs of the direction humanity must take for cultural, political and economic sustainability, and for exceptional teachers who will themselves grow as they lead students toward fulfillment in their world. The school can either passively be shaped by new technologies, new means of communication, economics, globalization, religious and political upheaval, or it can gather strength from its community, friends and supporters and continually shape a contemporary and comprehensive education that may serve as a model for others. Blue Oak chooses to do the latter.

To be an exceptional school, Blue Oak will insistently examine its programs, relationships and effectiveness to ensure that thoughtfulness and the pursuit of excellence inform its direction, as they have informed the process through which this Strategic Agenda has been crafted. The Agenda itself is intended – as it must be in a school dedicated to creativity and innovation – as simply the frame around which detailed strategies will be formed for implementation and assessment.

At the same time, Blue Oak adheres to its founding premises:

- Blue Oak School embraces demographic change that includes ethnic diversity – locally, a continuing increase in the Hispanic population.
- Blue Oak School is committed to a globally and environmentally sensitive education.
- Blue Oak School requires its students to be engaged with the real world in developmentally appropriate ways.
- Blue Oak emphasizes the social and emotional growth of each child and the development of empathy and resilience, in a caring community and culture.
- Blue Oak School believes in the unique capacities of each child and strives to develop excellence.

The Strategic Process:

In early November, 2010, the Blue Oak Board of Trustees invited Jacqueline Smethurst and David Drinkwater to assist the school in developing a vision and plans for the school's second decade. Over the course of the next three months, trustee Bruce Phillips and the consultants facilitated meetings with parents, faculty, board, founders, advisory board, and others to focus on needs and opportunities.

There was remarkable congruence in the values and ambitions held by participants in those discussions, and the steering group, comprising faculty, parents, administrators and trustees, winnowed multiple goals to propose five key priorities and an inspirational vision that recognizes both the key focus of Blue Oak – as a school for kindergartners through eighth graders – and its enfolding adult community.

On a rapid planning schedule and in a time of considerable change, it was agreed that a careful review of the current mission statement will follow the endorsement of the Strategic Agenda. Also in the next phase, administration will be charged with formulating specific plans that realize the five priorities over the next five years within the context of Blue Oak's twenty-year aspiration to inspire and create a truly unique community of life-long learners.

Blue Oak School's Vision

Blue Oak School will be nationally recognized as a beacon of progressive educational excellence, inspiring a community of lifelong learners.

Key elements of the school's vision:

- Recognition of Blue Oak as an outstanding school – a place of academic excellence employing innovative educational practices
- A strong and evolving progressive, resource-rich program that is both local and global in focus
- Human and financial resources sufficient to support and develop such a program
- A strong, connected, inspiring, engaged and inclusive community where all constituents help shape its culture
- Dedication to the education of students, kindergarten through eighth grade – *and* to a community-wide focus that engages students, families, faculty, friends and Napa Valley in a center for life-long learning – as a visionary example for others

Blue Oak School's Mission

Throughout the planning process participants emphasized the importance of:

- Social, emotional, and moral growth of the whole child
- Safe, diverse and collaborative community
- Dynamic engagement with the broader world
- Inspiring a love of learning and the pursuit of excellence

The current mission statement* will be further reviewed and refined, once the Strategic Agenda is approved.

** Blue Oak School offers a challenging and stimulating education to children of diverse backgrounds and interests. Balancing structure with choice and the requirements of the group with the gifts of the individual, the School holds itself to the highest standards of responsible educational innovation, so that students develop the skills and habits of learning that endure.*

Through the culture and community of the School, teachers nurture the development of character and foster confidence, creativity, flexibility and curiosity in each child. Students in turn encourage each other to learn. Relationships among freedom, responsibility, community and environment are explored through studies that engage students as stewards in service to the School, the region and the world.

Blue Oak School's Strategic Priorities

The five priorities address the school's program and purpose, its people, and institutional support:

➤ **Clarify the school's progressive educational philosophy and align the program with it**

Blue Oak School comes from a rich tradition of progressive education, yet the larger community needs to understand more comprehensively how and why the school educates the way it does. Internal discussion of Blue Oak's pedagogy and intellectual commitments will add insight and passion to the evolution of its program. External demonstration will begin to build awareness of Blue Oak's vision as a center for community learning. First, Blue Oak will need to demonstrate the value and excitement of its program. Then it will need to engage the broader community:

○ Develop the program

Blue Oak School believes in the innate capacity of all students to achieve excellence in many areas, as teachers guide and inspire them to construct meaning. The School reaffirms its commitment to environmental education, the arts, and interdisciplinary programs that enable students to integrate their understanding of the world. Blue Oak will continually develop cutting edge curricula and experiences that provide real-world insight.

○ Demonstrate its effectiveness

Because, as a progressive school, Blue Oak seeks alternatives to traditional testing, through use of portfolios, narrative assessment, and project based outcomes, the school needs to continually re-appraise its efficacy at the student level, in terms of classroom experience and delivery, and through the success of its graduates in their subsequent education. These forms of assessment help ensure deeper and richer appreciation of Blue Oak's level of excellence.

➤ **Engage with the broader community, both local and global**

- To live its philosophy and to bring life to its program, Blue Oak School will act explicitly on its implicit belief in the importance of creating a real learning community that embraces the larger community. Global awareness, human and environmental, is essential in this day and age. Blue Oak students will engage the broader world, in developmentally appropriate ways, through classroom, technology, and service learning. The aim, however, is to achieve not just the engagement of students, but reciprocal engagement between the school, as a community of learners, and the surrounding community.

- While focusing initially on its program for students, Blue Oak will begin to create the structures, events, learning opportunities that will bind adults to its visionary ambitions as a center of lifelong learning.

- **Recruit, retain, support and develop outstanding teachers**
 - Excellent teachers are the single most important resource of an excellent school. As Blue Oak becomes better recognized as a “beacon of progressive education”, teachers also become the lead ambassadors and the welcoming committee to those seeking to understand the School’s uniqueness. Visitors bring insights, knowledge of best practices, and innovative approaches to Blue Oak.

 - Teachers, in turn, are nurtured by the continual support of their growth across all segments of the school community, just as they offer counsel and support to families. Parents and friends also offer educational capabilities that can enlarge and redefine the school. As Blue Oak embraces the opportunity to be a more comprehensive center of learning, teachers, parents, administrators and board will shape a richer environment for students and adults.

- **Ensure the resources necessary to fully support all students admitted**
 - Blue Oak serves a compact area market. It also seeks to provide a unique education. Ensuring the right match between students, families and school is critically important. Providing the fundamental resources for success is equally so. Blue Oak School will examine how to effect the best match for the whole child and how it can provide integrated support for the range of abilities among the students it admits.

- **Ensure Institutional Support:**
 - Implement a strong financial sustainability plan
 - Develop and implement effective marketing and communication plans
 - Build effective governance and leadership

While finances, marketing and governance are integral aspects of a school’s operations at all times, the strategic priorities outlined above require particular attention to the fiscal, communications and leadership needs of Blue Oak School as it implements this Strategic Agenda.

Wise administration of financial resources, development of additional sources of funding, effective communication of the school’s philosophy and purpose, and appropriate allocation of responsibility for effecting -- and assessing -- new directions and innovative programs in more flexible and dynamic ways – all these will be essential for success. Blue Oak School commits to these strategies in support of its educational aims.

The Future

Today's challenges require that we find better ways of understanding and assessing educational processes and outcomes; create programs that meet expanding needs; serve a broader constituency; and evince more flexibility, more compassion and more commitment. Financial resources seem increasingly scarce, but educational resources have never been richer and more accessible. Those resources will grow ever deeper – through experiential opportunities, community and environmental outreach, and the wealth of materials increasingly available on the Web. The critical difference in the quality of education that the school will provide will lie in the nature and culture of its community. Hence the emphasis, in this Strategic Agenda, on the evolution of a unique kind of learning community that embraces all its members and reaches out to Napa, to the region and to the world. Blue Oak School will embrace today's challenges with vigor and creativity to ensure that its students grow in a stimulating, compelling, and innovative environment.

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