

PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY

A PLAN FOR DARROW SCHOOL 2024-2027



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HEAD OF SCHOOL

Dear Darrow Community,

Our mission at Darrow School is transformative, changing lives through an exceptional education. This plan is designed to secure what makes Darrow special, preserving our traditions while modernizing and building for the future. Together, we can ensure Darrow's continued success and inspire generations to come.

Sincerely,

Andrew J. Vadnais
Head of School

DRAFT

VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

VISION STATEMENT

Changing lives for the better using a one-of-a-kind curriculum made possible by a stunning location and unique historical heritage.

DARROW MISSION STATEMENT

Darrow School is dedicated to serving students with diverse backgrounds and abilities. We build on each student's individual talents and interests to inspire and build confidence in their success in college and life. This is accomplished through our active, differentiated, inclusive curriculum, which is rooted in the liberal arts and sciences, individually focused, and combines innovative classroom instruction with project-based learning and environmental consciousness.

CORE VALUES

GROWTH

We prioritize growth over perfection, recognizing that each individual has their own gifts, challenges, and goals to build from. Our students are safe to fail creatively, which is essential for true learning. They routinely revise and reflect on their work on their way toward mastery.

DIVERSITY

We believe that the opportunity to learn and grow in a small, diverse community during your formative years is irreplaceable. We actively cultivate and celebrate a student body that is diverse along many dimensions, including racial and ethnic diversity, diversity of gender identity, and neurodiversity.

COMMUNITY

Like the Shakers who inhabited this place before us, we believe in the power of an intentional community built around shared work and shared values. Darrow is deliberately small, which means that each community member is valued and influential.

COMPASSION

We seek to treat each other with compassion, recognizing that we may only know a small part of someone else's story.

AUTHENTICITY

We aspire to be a place where young people become comfortable in their own skin and empowered to understand and share their authentic selves.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

01. STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Overview: Strategic development is essential to Darrow School's sustainability, growth, and educational excellence. Darrow is committed to creating a clear, actionable plan aligned with our Mission and Core Values, addressing immediate challenges, and positioning Darrow as a leader in the small boarding school community. This process will involve collaboration among board members, faculty, alumni, parents, and students, leveraging the collective wisdom of the Darrow community to craft a comprehensive plan that meets current needs and anticipates future opportunities and challenges.

INITIATIVES:

- Establish strategic task force to guide, inform, and implement the plan.
- Establish a visual tracking system for leadership to monitor and adjust work.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

O2. FINANCIAL STABILITY AND GROWTH

Overview: Darrow relies on tuition revenue to cover more than 80% of annual operating expenses. Financial stability will be achieved when Net Tuition Revenue (NTR), plus Annual Fund and Endowment Income, enable us to achieve a balanced budget without the need for extraordinary fundraising to cover operating deficits.

O2-A. ENROLLMENT AND MARKETING

Overview: Leverage Darrow's unparalleled education and experience to establish Darrow as a leader within the small boarding school community, which will allow for more robust recruitment of both students and faculty. Despite changes brought by the internet and social media, Darrow is still relatively unknown in the outside world and needs to strengthen admissions outreach.

INITIATIVES:

- Secure net tuition revenue (NTR) to meet budget expectations.
- Work with top consultant to create more robust digital marketing. (In process as of May 2024)
- Increase and improve engagement with the alumni community to allow Darrow to harness alumni skills and vet future trustees.
- Make better use of the expanded educational consultant network by providing more regular staff visits and clear communications about Darrow. (In process)
- Reinvigorate our connections in the international markets, which are coming back to life after the Covid shutdown. (International travel Fall 2024)
- Lean on newly invigorated alumni/parents in the wider Darrow family and keep them well-informed through clear and regular communication.
- Establish key feeder schools for Darrow.
- Appoint qualified staff members to function as surrogates of the admissions office who will "recruit" students and, with the advancement office, pursue funding for their respective programs, also working with relevant staff to consider unique summer programming options to drive auxiliary revenue.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

02-B. ADVANCEMENT & ALUMNI RELATIONS

Overview: Darrow's advancement program is an area of great opportunity that requires immediate and significant attention. The Save Darrow Campaign highlighted both the success of a grassroots approach to fundraising and how the school had lost touch with many of its alumni over the years. Darrow needs to focus on engaging with alumni and friends in order to maintain the incredible support the community has shown this past year. Darrow's modest endowment limits our ability to support its diverse community, especially when it comes to financial aid. Thus, Darrow must seek and establish external revenue sources to help fund its operation and broaden community awareness of what Darrow offers.

INITIATIVES:

- Rebuild advancement with a focus on transformational giving and long-term relationship building.
- Upgrade Darrow's advancement infrastructure and approach, which will allow Darrow to re-engage with alumni, strengthen communications, build connections, and cultivate donor relationships.
- Engage a fundraising/advancement consultant to help pursue additional revenue streams and partnerships. (In process)
- Visit the top 70 potential donors and secure a significant gift (\$5M+) to inspire others.
- Hire additional development staff and prioritize database updates.
- Empower and support alums/friends to reinvigorate regional gatherings.
- Increase and improve engagement with the alumni community to allow Darrow to harness alumni skills and vet future trustees, including the creation of an alumni advisory body (DAAG).

02-C. AUXILIARY SOURCES OF REVENUE

Overview: The Darrow campus lends itself well to overnight meetings and gatherings during the summer months, when students are not present.

INITIATIVES:

- Reclaim Darrow's rightful place as the real steward and interpreter of the Mount Lebanon Shaker Story through creative programming.
- Recruit recurring summer camps to provide consistent annual income.
- Continue to explore strategic partnering efforts.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

03. ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Overview: To remain competitive in the independent school world, Darrow must continue differentiating itself with unique and powerful program offerings. The Art, Design, and Innovation curricula and the Learning Skills Program have succeeded. These are not enough. To truly differentiate in a crowded academic environment, Darrow must continue refining its differentiated, real-world, problem-based pedagogy, combined with an entrepreneurial spirit and educational programs. These, combined with the unique historic campus, will provide a living laboratory for students to enhance multiple critical skills that will carry them forward for the rest of their lives, and, importantly, Darrow's hardworking faculty and staff need to be compensated competitively.

INITIATIVES:

- Work toward a comprehensive compensation plan to enhance faculty recruitment and retention.
- Create a historic preservation curriculum.
- Expand eSports program.
- Train several faculty members in Orton-Gillingham methodology.
- Expand the Performing and Visual Arts Programs.
- Hands-to-Work+ Hands-On Classroom Learning+ Participatory Co-Curriculum.
- Consider enhancing the Hands-to-Work program into an intentional program that teaches traditional crafts.
- At the start of the 2024/25 school year, Darrow will collaborate with Syracuse University's Project Advance (SUPA) program to provide our students with an additional academic challenge. SUPA allows qualified students to register for specific Syracuse University courses as part of their regular academic schedule at Darrow, which enables them to earn transferable college credits. Additionally, it offers professional development opportunities for our faculty to take advantage of.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

04. STUDENT LIFE AND WELL-BEING

Overview: Expand experiences that meet adolescents' developmental needs. Evaluate all decisions with the lens of determining if any change, enhancement, or new program upholds Darrow's Core Values and the developmental needs of adolescents.

INITIATIVES:

- Strengthen and leverage Signature Program offerings with balance among the arts, academics, and sports.
- Continue developing girls' basketball and boys' and girls' soccer recruitment.





STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Do you have any feedback on the working plan?

Scan the QR code above!

