

A NEW DIRECTION

There is change all around us. Many ask why? There is change all around us so that we, Worcester Academy, will improve. It is crucial in all facets of life that individuals and institutions continually reevaluate their reason for being, their strategic plans, and their ability to get better.

I am writing this paper in order to explain to you what this new direction is and how it will be implemented. Although I have written and spoken a number of times before of the importance of the new strategic direction for Worcester Academy's curriculum, many still seem either confused or unwilling to accept the reality.

Let me start first with a few salient definitions:

- **The Curriculum** for our purposes is what we teach (content and skills), how we teach it (methodology), and how we assess or evaluate students – **all three**.
- **Student-centeredness**, as it relates to curriculum, means making sure that what we teach, how we teach and how we assess students meets their needs. It means that we need to put more attention to inter-disciplinary studies, co-operative learning, varied forms of student evaluation, varied teaching methodologies, and a more global perspective across the board.
- **The Strategic Plan** was created by a committee of faculty, administrators, trustees, parents and alumni in 2002 and approved by a unanimous vote of the Board of Trustees in January, 2003. It serves as a road map for the Headmaster, the faculty and the administration, and is expected to be implemented within a five-year window.
- **The Curriculum Direction of the Plan** is found specifically in the first three goals:
 1. **To become a more student-centered school whose policies, practices and curriculum are governed by, and grounded in, what is in the best educational interest of the students.**
 2. **To ensure that our curriculum meets our institutional mission.**
 3. **The Academy will take more advantage of its urban location to further its curriculum goals.**

The Board only hires one employee to run Worcester Academy. It is my contractual job to ensure that the policies and directions for the Academy, set by the Board, are upheld and implemented. Therefore, it becomes my responsibility to hire and lead the administration and faculty toward these ends. It was both the Board's perception, and mine, that by the end of the academic year, 2003-2004, we had not moved quickly enough toward the successful implementation of the first three goals of the Strategic Plan. Therefore, I made a number of changes. Most importantly, a new school-wide Curriculum Committee was established and put under the leadership of Antonio Viva. Two curriculum coordinators were added to help facilitate the strategic direction in both the Humanities and the Math-Science areas. Their roles are to look at curriculum horizontally (across a discipline) and vertically (between disciplines.)

After decades of talking about curriculum study and revision, the time has finally arrived for Worcester Academy. This is a time to look ahead! We are in the midst of a very exciting time. Many of you have asked what roles will the different constituencies- faculty, department chairs, coordinators, dean of faculty, division directors, curriculum committee, assistant head of school, head of school, and the board - play? Let me try and explain more clearly how curriculum decisions are made and will continue to be made at Worcester Academy. Policy and strategic direction are set by the Board. The Head of School is charged by the Board to implement the strategic plans and to see that the program meets the Mission and the Philosophy of the Academy.

1. The Assistant Head of School is responsible to the Head for all curriculum matters and chairs the Curriculum Committee.
2. All major curriculum initiatives are processed through the Curriculum Committee and recommendations are given to the Head of School. The Curriculum Committee is charged by the Head of School to make sure that our academic program is meeting the strategic direction and mission of the School in grades 6- 12.
3. The Curriculum Coordinators report to the Assistant Head of School and are responsible for helping facilitate the curriculum direction of the Academy. They also are members of the Curriculum Committee.
4. The Division Directors are responsible for the daily operation of their divisions. In simple terms they see that the curriculum direction successfully gets put into daily practice.
5. The Dean of Faculty is a member of the Curriculum Committee and is responsible for the evaluation and the professional support of all faculty.
6. Department Chairs are responsible to the Assistant Head of School for major curriculum matters and are responsible to the Division Directors for daily operational matters. Department Chairs are an important administrative link between the academic direction of the Academy and the teaching faculty.
7. The teachers are the foundation of the curriculum. It is in our classrooms that the strategic direction of the school's curriculum is put into practice. Classroom teachers make up the majority of the Curriculum Committee. There is an open conduit from the teacher through the Department Chairs and the Curriculum Coordinators to the Curriculum Committee for new ideas. Teachers must feel free to take risks, to experiment, to be willing to change methodologies and the evaluation of students in order to continually improve the learning process. New course offerings, interdisciplinary ideas, new electives most naturally spring from the faculty, not from above. The direction and mission for our curriculum is driven from above, but the actual implementation and creativity comes from the classroom leaders.

Where is the effort to implement Goals 1, 2, and 3 of the Strategic Plan today? We have concluded a very helpful curriculum audit process in which we gathered data on curriculum content, skills, teaching methodologies, and assessment tools. The coordinators have analyzed these audits and given this feedback to departments for review and comment. The Curriculum Committee has spearheaded an effort to evaluate how our curriculum fits with our mission and the needs of our students, today and in the future. This study was the catalyst for the "Bridging the Gap" document that will help "to ensure that the principles of our strategic plan and statement of mission and philosophy resonate in the daily teaching and learning at the Academy." The Curriculum Committee has approved a move in the upper school to trimesters beginning in the fall of 2006. Other faculty

members are discussing ways to implement a service learning component to our curriculum and add an interdisciplinary focus. Finally, the Academy is in the process of revising its faculty professional development program so that all our teachers will be better prepared to meet our new curriculum challenges and support will be provided for those who need assistance.

In conclusion, after more than two decades of being prodded into doing curriculum review and revision by outside consultants, the NEASC, past headmasters and strategic plans, the process is well underway. Many of you are already caught up in the momentum and excitement. This is not a “passing fancy”; it is a reality. Our expectation is that every department, every teacher, and every administrator will give an honest effort to get on board. It is our hope that through this process we will have begun to see ourselves as a community of learners – an institution whose purpose and mission are rooted in tradition, but whose program of study is fluid, innovative and constantly evolving to meet the needs of our students in the 21st Century.