



STRATEGIC PLAN
2002 - 2005

*Newark is our home.
Education is our work.
The world is our future.*

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Dear Link Family,

It is with great satisfaction that we write to you introducing Link's second strategic plan. The three-year plan comes at an exciting and pivotal time in Link's 33 year history as we consider the recent growth of the school and the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Link embarked on its first strategic plan in 1999. Guided by this plan, Link has undergone a significant period of institutional growth and student accomplishment. Here are a few highlights:

- *Standardized Test Scores:* The Classes of 2000, 2001, and 2002 increased 2.5 grade levels in reading, language, and math on the national McGraw-Hill standardized tests.
- *High School Acceptances:* 100% of Link's last three graduating classes have earned an acceptance into a quality private high school.
- *High School Scholarships:* The last three graduating classes have earned over \$2.9 million in scholarships and aid to some of the best high schools in the country.
- *High School Graduation and College Attendance:* 95% of our 1996-98 graduates completed high school and 75% went on to attend college.

Link has also strengthened the program and organization during the last three years. Throughout this period Link has:

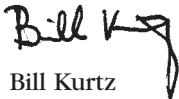
- Revised the school's mission statement.
- Infused into the community Link's core values and core performance standards.
- Added a studio art, music, Spanish and a high school prep program to the curriculum.
- Earned accreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools.
- Implemented the first phase of our technology plan.
- Increased annual fundraising from \$540,000 in 1999 to \$1.3 million in 2002.

In March 2002, the Board of Trustees appointed a planning council to develop a second plan to address our strategic challenges and

guide our future growth. Over a five month period, the council energetically pursued its charge, assessing our current program, debating needs and goals, and ultimately constructing a strategic plan. The plan sets forth goals and objectives in five areas: 1) Academics; 2) Student Life; 3) Faculty and Administration Development; 4) Development, Board Relations and External Affairs; and 5) Facilities and Finance. Among the most significant themes and calls to action in the plan are:

- An unwavering pursuit of an excellent academic program that will best prepare our students to succeed in outstanding high schools and colleges.
- The development of financial resources to attract and retain an outstanding faculty, upgrade the physical plant, and strengthen the school's long term financial base.
- A focus on strengthening the role of the alumni and parents in the school community.

This plan lays out a vision to help Link sustain the exciting growth which the institution has enjoyed over the last three years. With the guidance of the Trustees, we look forward to expanding our school community to include new partners and new ideas as we strive to reach our goals.



Bill Kurtz
Principal



Sister Arlene Antczak, O.P.
Chair, Board of Trustees

Link Community School

Brief History

Link Community School was founded by the Dominican Sisters in 1969 in response to the Newark riots and the resulting devastation of the Central Ward community. Link was created to help rebuild the community by providing exceptional education for many young people who were left in poverty. The founders believed that small class settings combined with opportunities for creative expression would transform potential dropouts into community leaders. Critical to achieving that goal was providing each child the freedom to develop intellectually and emotionally in a safe, structured learning community that had high expectations. Based on these convictions, Link has grown into a thriving independent middle school.

Link Community School Today

Today, thirty-three years after its founding, Link continues to fulfill its original purpose. Link works with Newark public schools, sharing their goal to prepare Newark youth for success as productive and responsible citizens. Public schools welcome Link's recruitment efforts, recognizing that Link offers urban middle school students individual attention within a supportive community. Approximately 90% of our students come to us from Newark, while 10% come from surrounding communities such as East Orange, Hillside, Irvington, Orange, Roselle and Union. For these students, who come from economically disadvantaged families, such an alternative is critical for academic success, and one not otherwise available at a very low cost to their parents.

Link currently enrolls over 125 seventh and eighth grade students, primarily of African-American descent. The school employs a unique balanced admissions policy, selecting a cross-section of students who are below grade level, at grade level, and above grade level, and provides a rigorous high school preparatory education in a setting that emphasizes community constructed on six core values (Respect, Responsibility, Caring, Honesty, Doing One's Best, and Following Instructions). Link challenges students academically and expects students to meet a set of interdisciplinary core performance standards. Link's commitment to our students' learning is reflected in small classes of 16 or fewer

students and a student to teacher ratio of nine to one. The commitment of Link's faculty, staff and parents to our students' education underlies each student's personal success.

To ensure that any family, including those on public assistance, can afford Link's education, we ask families to pay a nominal contribution for their child's education based upon family income. As a result, Link depends upon the generous support of our contributors to make our students' education possible. Gifts to Link provide approximately 85% of the school's operating revenue.

Link's success has been measured by the changed lives of over 1,800 graduates, many of whom have attributed their personal success to the life-changing experience they had at Link. Link places its graduates in some of the finest independent schools in the Mid-Atlantic region as well as leading parochial and magnet high schools in the Newark area.

100% of the graduates have earned acceptances to independent schools over the last three years. The 2000-2002 graduating classes have earned over \$2.9 million in scholarships to independent schools.

Mission

Link Community School seeks to provide an outstanding independent middle school education for Newark adolescents of all academic abilities from economically disadvantaged families. Link endeavors to create a powerful learning community built on a collective commitment to excellence and enduring core values. By building a strong academic foundation and instilling life long values, Link aims to develop students who will be successful in higher education and responsible and resourceful citizens who give back to others.

Core Values

Respect

Responsibility

Honesty

Caring

Doing One's Best

Following Directions

Vision Statement

We aspire as a school community to achieve the following vision:

- ***Educational Excellence:*** To provide students of all ability levels an exceptional education on par with the best middle school education offered anywhere in the country. A Link education will provide students the academic foundation and character development necessary to be successful, life long learners and members of their future communities.
- ***High School Placement:*** To place students in top high schools in the region and country and to ensure that they have the skills to succeed in those programs.
- ***Inspiring Other Schools:*** To be recognized as a model urban middle school for our student success and innovative educational practices. Link aims to inspire and support the development of other highly effective schools that provide similar success for thousands of under-served students.

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Academics

- A. Increase students' academic preparedness for high school success by maximizing student learning time.
 - 1. Increase reading and writing classes from 6 to 9 periods a week in order to accomplish Middle States Accreditation goals.
 - 2. Increase frequency of practice with basic math facts and procedures through the use of additional instructional periods in order to accomplish Middle States Accreditation goals.
 - 3. Investigate a schedule that maximizes student learning while balancing team dynamics, staffing, tracking, and interdisciplinary concerns.

- B. Increase students' academic preparedness for high school success by strengthening curriculum.
 - 1. Determine a time line and appropriate sequence for the Core Performance Standards over a two year time period.
 - 2. Execute mandated content and skill curriculum standards (on par with top New Jersey Independent Middle Schools) for both core and co-curricular subjects.
 - 3. Integrate technology throughout all disciplines by requiring departmental technology performance projects.

Student Life

- A. Empower students to use the Core Values as leaders within the community.
 - 1. Evaluate and increase leadership opportunities for students in order to achieve the Middle States student performance Core Values objective.
 - 2. Establish a service learning graduation requirement in which students work as teams on a service project.

- B. Provide the resources to support and nurture the academic, social, and physical well-being of each student.
 - 1. Increase the social worker counseling days from two a week to three.
 - 2. Expand the advisory system's curriculum to include important adolescent social and health issues.
 - 3. Initiate parent/teacher led workshops to assist parents with such issues as helping their child with homework, processing report cards, understanding the purpose behind school rules, and increasing their involvement in school life.
 - 4. Expand the capacity of the Parent-Teacher Group (PTG) by strengthening parent leadership opportunities and by providing the structure for the PTG to work more effectively as an organization.

Faculty and Administration Development

- A. Create and sustain a supportive, innovative learning environment where faculty and administrators are empowered to be leaders and experts in their disciplines and areas of responsibility.
 - 1. Teachers and administrators will produce annually a complete professional portfolio showing evidence of goal setting, reflection, and progress towards and achievement of these goals through ongoing information sharing and documentation in the form of mid-year and end-point performance reviews.
 - 2. Teachers and administrators will annually produce a report on at least one visit to an exceptional model school to gather information, establish professional contacts, and promote our program. Teachers and administrators will also produce a report on their participation in at least one external professional workshop per year.
 - 3. Make staff additions to facilitate release time for teachers to participate in on-site and off-site professional development, and to reduce faculty classroom teaching responsibilities by 15%.
 - 4. Make use of existing and new avenues of publicity to celebrate faculty's achievements to a broad audience both within and outside the school community.
 - 5. Seek membership in the New Jersey Association of Independent Schools.

- B. Provide timely and ongoing teacher education and support programs targeting specific school-wide needs.
 - 1. Create a menu of resources to assist and support teachers in identifying and addressing the special needs of our students. This may include but not be limited to delivering workshops and seeking professional, expert services.
 - 2. Design, document, and deliver a curriculum for training first year and experienced teachers/administrators new to Link, and produce a manual of core teaching tools and practices required to be implemented by all teachers/administrators.

3. Design, document, and deliver a series of in-services on technology.
4. Design a program to promote mentoring relationships between veteran teachers and new teachers that includes a system of rewards and accountability.

Development, Board Relations and External Affairs

- A. Establish and execute a development plan for the long-term stability and growth of the school.
 - 1. Perform a feasibility study to determine the viability of a long-term capital campaign.
 - 2. Based on the findings of the feasibility study, formulate a comprehensive plan for a capital campaign and begin implementation in Year 3 of this strategic plan.
 - 3. Develop a high-profile advisory committee that works directly with the school and the board on a wide range of projects and provides access to important contacts and funding.
- B. Develop and implement a comprehensive public relations and community relations strategy to increase awareness and communicate the school's measurable achievements.
 - 1. Create a sophisticated website that will be used for both internal and external communication.
 - 2. Develop appropriate printed material with a consistent visual identity to highlight Link's many strengths and successes. Printed material should include but not be limited to a new school view book and a 1-page fact sheet.
 - 3. Initiate a specific strategy to strengthen relationships with major New Jersey area media as well as relevant national media. The Goal of this strategy is for Link to be featured a minimum of once nationally and three times locally per year.
 - 4. Cultivate a minimum of two significant partnerships with other organizations that share our mission. Partnerships will require a minimum 1-year commitment and focus on providing Link students with unique educational opportunities and/or mentoring.
- C. Cultivate and facilitate stronger Alumni involvement in all aspects of the School.
 - 1. Elect a minimum of 1 alumnus/a to the Board of Trustees in the next 3 years.
 - 2. Develop an alumni contact and support program. This will

be accomplished by conducting regular visits to high schools, analyzing data collected during site visits and forming high school transition teams.

- D. Increase the role that the Board of Trustees plays in the short-term and long-term growth of the school.
 - 1. Develop collaborative programs that foster increased communication and awareness of the Board and its mission to the larger school community.
 - 2. Increase the racial/ethnic diversity of the Board.
 - 3. Strengthen the Board's institutional capacity through appropriate Board appointments and by the strengthening of the sub-committee structure.
 - 4. Increase the size of the Board of Trustees to twenty-six.

Facilities and Finance

- A. Improve the financial management of the school.
 - 1. Accumulate a “rainy day” fund.
 - 2. Implement more automated and streamlined accounting through the use of new technology and software.
- B. Improve faculty and staff compensation.
 - 1. Raise the salary scale so that it is above the New Jersey Association of Independent Schools’ second quintile median salary per year of experience.
 - 2. Investigate additional staff benefits including dental insurance and a sabbatical program.
- C. Upgrade school facilities.
 - 1. Improve the state of current school facilities, especially:
 - a) Student bathrooms
 - b) Spanish classroom
 - c) Visible and accessible entrance.
 - 2. Secure regular use of an athletic field by lease arrangement or purchase.
 - 3. Produce a report, including a cost/benefit analysis, investigating future plant possibilities, including:
 - a) Purchase of surrounding land and/or adding to current facilities
 - b) Purchase of a new site and building
 - c) Other arrangements.

LINK COMMUNITY SCHOOL

120 Livingston Street
Newark, New Jersey 07103
973.642.0529
www.linkschool.org