

# walden

STRATEGIC PLAN 2011-2016





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2011-2012

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*Teaching that we all  
have stewardship for the  
world in which we live*

## STRATEGIC PLAN INTRODUCTION

At Walden School, we nurture a child's natural wonder and personal dignity. We provide a personalized, developmentally appropriate program that encourages responsibility, initiative, child-led inquiry, ethical behavior, and excellence. We promote positive conflict-resolution skills, understanding, and creativity in problem solving. Children learn academic skills and concepts through experience and Socratic discussion, as well as through direct instruction and practice. We teach children to value and respect diversity. We strive, therefore, to lay the foundation for wisdom, to encourage the spirit of Renaissance learning, and to teach that we all have stewardship for the world in which we live.

Over the past several years, Walden School has made important accomplishments based on the previous strategic plan, as well as leveraging unexpected opportunities. Significant investments were made to faculty salaries, financial aid, and professional development. The North Playground and South Playground were renovated, as was the Toby Hayward Community Room. A Master Site Plan was developed and the purchase of the apartment building at 83 South Daisy was completed. Walden Fund contributions reached CAIS norms and a Capital Campaign was launched. A robust 6th grade matriculation process was put in place as our students matriculated to the independent schools of their choice and a comprehensive Middle School Feasibility was completed.

To build on these achievements, support the Walden Mission, and enhance the learning experience for students, the Board of Trustees began the development of a new Strategic Plan in January 2010. Crafted from voices of the entire Walden community, this Plan sets the direction of the school from 2011 through 2016. The Walden Board of Trustees has the responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the plan, setting priorities, balancing resources, and evaluating its effectiveness. The plan is ambitious and will require strong board leadership combined with the energy, talent, and dedication of the Walden administration, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, and other members of the Walden community to ensure its success.

The Strategic Plan consists of nine goals covering the areas of the Academic Program, Faculty and Staff, Admissions, Diversity, Environmental Stewardship, Finance, Campus Development and Facilities, Institutional Advancement and Communications, and Governance. The goals are numbered in the plan, but intentionally do not reflect a priority either in importance or urgency. An implementation plan will be developed by the administration and Board, which will include a logical sequence for implementing the goals. The implementation plan will be reviewed annually and updated as needed to address the changing academic and financial environment.

The Walden Board of Trustees is excited to embark on this ambitious and inspirational plan and realizes the planning process does not end with the achievements of the plan, but must continue in the development before the end of the five-year period.

The Strategic Planning Committee—a committee of 13 members representing faculty, staff, Board of Trustees, and parents—were charged with creating this plan. The development of the plan spanned 16 months and included review of Walden's mission, community wide meetings and surveys, reflection, research, and discussion on the issues important to the future growth of Walden. The Committee is pleased that the Strategic Plan reflects the goals and values of the Walden community, embraces the Walden mission, and will serve as the catalyst for exciting progress and growth.

## HISTORICAL STATEMENT

Marilyn Nikimaa and Ted Calleton founded the Walden School in 1970 as a non-profit, independent, co-educational elementary school with a Montessori base and multi-age classrooms. From 1970 through 1989, while located in leased space in the basement of a church in Pasadena, Walden School enrolled approximately 100 students in Pre-Kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

In 1976, Walden was accredited by the California Association of Independent Schools. Walden enjoys a reputation in the Pasadena area for having a strong developmental emphasis. The “Walden Agreements,” still in use today, were developed during this period to help guide the quality of relationships expected at school.

In late 1989, an extraordinary group of school parents purchased property on South San Gabriel Boulevard, which is now the South Building of our current campus. Together, the Board of Trustees and parents arranged the financing and renovation and transformed the building into Walden’s first permanent dwelling. In 1999, Walden continued its growth and purchased the adjacent building, now the North Building, expanding the campus and increasing the student body to 215.

Today, Walden serves approximately 220 students in Pre-Kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade in 12 classrooms, complemented by our Art Studio, Science and Technology Laboratories, a 9,000-volume Library, as well as our prized Toby Hayward Community Room. In addition, in Spring 2006, Walden opened a renovated North Playground and Pre-K yards, providing playful and beautiful outdoor spaces for the entire school community.

Implementation of the Master Site Plan, approved by the Board of Trustees in June of 2010 after a comprehensive survey of the Walden community, will renew and grow the campus over the next five to ten years.

Throughout Walden’s history, the educational philosophy has remained firmly rooted in its founding. The philosophy is based on the belief that successful learning requires a strong academic program that respects each child’s pace and individual style of learning. The values that underlie the program are academic excellence, self-discipline, environmental awareness, personal responsibility, and collaboration. Walden nurtures these values in a warm, caring, and flexible environment.

## THE MISSION

At Walden, we nurture a child’s natural wonder and personal dignity.

We provide a personalized, developmentally appropriate program that encourages responsibility, initiative, child-led inquiry, ethical behavior, and excellence. We promote positive conflict-resolution skills, understanding, and creativity in problem solving.

Children learn academic skills and concepts through experience and Socratic discussion, as well as through direct instruction and practice. We teach children to value and respect diversity.

We strive, therefore, to lay the foundation for wisdom, to encourage the spirit of Renaissance learning, and to teach that we all have stewardship for the world in which we live.

## ACADEMIC PROGRAM

### GOAL I:

**Walden will continue to assess the curriculum to meet the needs of Walden students by examining fundamental questions in program content, design, and delivery.**

### RATIONALE:

Understanding that students learn best when offered a variety of approaches, it is essential to continually develop the school program using current research and best pedagogical practices.

### IMPLEMENTATION:

1. Review the program to ensure that the pace and scope are developmentally appropriate within a progressive educational framework.
2. Examine, sustain, and articulate the multi-age approach at Walden.
3. Review and enhance the practice of differentiated instruction at Walden to ensure that the growth and developmental needs of children are being met.
4. Develop assessments that support and are aligned with Walden’s Curriculum Guide and provide effective and meaningful feedback to students, parents, and faculty.
5. Develop a school-wide approach to the use of technology within the framework of a progressive education.
6. Review and expand the educational program with regard to multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion.
7. Use the Master Site Plan as a unique opportunity to teach the values of environmental stewardship.
8. Explore and develop opportunities for integrating service learning into more aspects of the curriculum.
9. Examine and clarify Walden’s approach to personal and social development to ensure that there is continuity across core levels.

## FACULTY AND STAFF

### GOAL II:

Focus on retaining and recruiting teachers whose commitment to progressive education is evident in their passion for student-centered teaching, commitment to a challenging academic program, and capacity to support the intellectual, emotional, and character development of Walden students.

### RATIONALE:

The success of every good school depends upon the quality of its teachers. Hiring, developing, retaining, and supporting talented faculty is crucial to the future success and strong reputation of Walden School and its students.

### IMPLEMENTATION:

1. Recruit qualified faculty and staff who share the progressive educational philosophy and who will bring the best professional practices to Walden and contribute to a diverse, collaborative culture.
2. Further develop a faculty evaluation program based on commonly held professional attributes that support direct communication and accountability for the faculty.
3. Increase funding for faculty professional development to support the development and implementation of best practices.
4. Ensure that salaries are sufficiently competitive to recruit and retain the best faculty and staff.

*Nurturing a child's  
natural wonder and  
personal dignity*

## COMMUNITY OF THE SCHOOL: ADMISSIONS

### GOAL III:

Support a strong admissions and retention program designed to attract students and families to the progressive foundation and practice of Walden School.

### RATIONALE:

Maintaining a student body of curious, motivated, and diverse students is an essential component of long-term sustainability and vitality for Walden and for Walden students.

### IMPLEMENTATION:

1. Clarify and update, as necessary, a methodology to determine the optimal enrollment and class configuration for Pre-Kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
2. Annually clarify and review the retention rate at Walden and pursue strategies to increase the rate of retention to levels comparable to local peer schools and consistent with NAIS guidelines for healthy retention.
3. Create strategies to extend Walden's recruitment outreach to a wider geographic area and to non-traditional venues.
4. Develop strategies for addressing the tension between the cost of a Walden education and limited family resources.
5. To support retention efforts, regularly assess parent satisfaction with the school.

*to encourage the  
spirit of Renaissance  
learning*

## COMMUNITY OF THE SCHOOL: DIVERSITY

### GOAL IV:

**Through specific strategies, build a school community that has a shared commitment to developing, sustaining, and supporting a diverse, inclusive, and multicultural community reflective of the population of southern California.**

### RATIONALE:

As an essential element of a Walden education, we strive to foster both diversity and diversity awareness inside and outside the classroom to prepare all of the students to embrace and participate in the global community.

### IMPLEMENTATION:

1. Define terms such as diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusion, so that families, trustees, teachers, staff, and students understand and use a shared vocabulary.
2. Provide the financial resources needed to attract and sustain socio-economic diversity at Walden.
3. Create learning opportunities and community discussions to deepen awareness of diversity issues and to reinforce the value of a vibrant diverse community at Walden.
4. Regularly review the academic program to ensure that diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusivity are reflected in the curriculum.

## COMMUNITY OF THE SCHOOL: ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

### GOAL V:

**Using the educational program as the platform, establish Walden School and its community as a model for ecological sustainability and environmental stewardship in an urban setting.**

### RATIONALE:

As a progressive institution, it is incumbent on Walden not only to provide life-long learning skills that lead to sustainable living practices, but also to inspire a heartfelt and personal appreciation for the world in which we live.

### IMPLEMENTATION:

1. Review the latest innovations involving green architecture and energy conservation concerning sustainability in urban settings for potential implementation at Walden.

2. Develop outreach partnerships with non-profit, public, and corporate organizations to build support for Walden's commitment to environmental stewardship.
3. Review and maintain Board-approved guidelines that outline activities and practices demonstrating Walden's commitment to ecological sustainability and environmental stewardship.
4. Highlight environmental programs and student activities (both in and outside the classroom) to raise awareness in the larger community of Walden's commitment to environmental education.

## FINANCE

### GOAL VI:

**Strengthen Walden's long-term financial position by reinforcing existing sound fiscal practices and by placing a new focus on expanding the endowment and increasing voluntary philanthropic support.**

### RATIONALE:

Financial stability, sustainability, accessibility, and growth are essential to fulfilling the school's mission.

### IMPLEMENTATION:

1. Create a Five-Year Financial Plan that increases operating efficiencies, supports the Mission Statement and strategic initiatives, and ensures financial stability.
2. Identify sources for funding financial assistance above and beyond tuition, including, but not limited to, increasing endowment.
3. Diversify revenue streams to reduce Walden's dependence on tuition income.
4. Prioritize capital projects based on programmatic benefits and return on investment of time, energy, and financial resources.

## CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT AND FACILITIES

### GOAL VII:

**Provide optimal facilities for teaching and learning in a progressive educational environment by implementing the Master Site Plan.**

### RATIONALE:

Given that good tools produce good work, further development of the environment and facilities will support optimal teaching and learning.

### IMPLEMENTATION:

1. Using the Master Site Plan, set priorities for facility needs, program, and design requirements.
2. Conduct a facility audit to determine the cost for priority needs.
3. Involve faculty in all phases of the Master Site Plan by seeking input on optimal teaching spaces that support the school's educational philosophy.
4. Work with the Development, Finance, and Environmental Committees, as well as the Board of Trustees, to secure the capital gifts needed to implement the Master Site Plan.

## INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

### GOAL VIII:

**Create and fulfill plans for strong fundraising based on a distinctive institutional identity, a strong development office, a culture of philanthropy, and a visionary plan for campus renewal and expansion.**

### RATIONALE:

In order to sustain the quality of Walden's education, it is important to create and foster a culture of philanthropy that is tied to the community commitment to and passion for Walden.

### IMPLEMENTATION:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of Walden's current fundraising strategies and programs to prepare for a major capital campaign to support both facilities and endowment.
2. Set ambitious goals for annual giving and provide the support and planning to reach the goal.

3. Strengthen the effectiveness of the Parent Guild as a partner in development and communications efforts, as well as a key to fostering an inclusive parent community.
4. Develop a long-term, systematic program to cultivate alumni relationships, giving, and support.
5. Complete a professionally-led branding exercise to clarify, strengthen, and highlight Walden's identity both internally and externally.
6. Raise Walden's profile in the local neighborhood by publicizing and inviting neighbors to participate in school events.

## GOVERNANCE

### GOAL IX:

**Walden will recruit and support trustees who are committed to the progressive educational philosophy, supportive of the school's long-term goals, and willing to be leaders of the school's fundraising efforts, including both annual giving and capital fundraising.**

### RATIONALE:

Grounded in transparency, discipline, and foresight, Walden will sustain a strong Board of Trustees as a key element of the school's leadership.

### IMPLEMENTATION:

1. Recruit new trustees who understand and treasure Walden's mission.
2. Ensure that trustees embrace their responsibility for leading a capital campaign and increasing annual giving.
3. Assure that the Board's processes and structures align with best practices.
4. Maintain focus of the Board of Trustees on strategic initiatives and progress toward strategic goals.
5. Recruit trustees who represent the diversity of greater Pasadena and the San Gabriel Valley.
6. Initiate leadership succession planning for the Board and the Director.