



Leading Girls' Education

Strategic Plan | 2016-2021



Letter to our Community

Since its founding in 1869, The Agnes Irwin School has dedicated itself to providing an exceptional and empowering education to girls. Rooted in academic excellence, scholarship, community, and connection, Agnes Irwin consistently tailors its programs to the unique and individual needs of girls, always holding fast to the principle that a girl's educational journey from childhood through graduation should be joyful, challenging, creative, and inspirational. Our mission continues to guide us as we approach our 150th year as a pioneer in girls' education.

Our strength as an institution stems from strong leadership, extraordinary teachers, and a deeply engaged community. Maintaining our excellence requires that we continually reflect on our values and goals in the context of the world around us and periodically articulate a strategic vision for our future. Given the pace of change in today's world, it is imperative we understand our evolving landscape, anticipate our future, and think boldly about how Agnes Irwin will meet the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

Over the past year, our community participated in an intense process of reflection and strategic thinking, providing the foundation for **Leading Girls' Education: The Strategic Plan of The Agnes Irwin School 2016-2021**. This Plan charts a forward-looking course for the School's future, informed by input from our own community and the latest research in education. The initiatives and goals enumerated in the Plan are our most important priorities and compelling opportunities. These goals will serve as beacons to lead the way forward for our faculty and administration, for our parent and alumnae communities, and – most important – for the current and next generations of Agnes Irwin girls.

Our last full Strategic Plan, published in 2000, paved the way for expanded curricular and extra-curricular program offerings in all disciplines, as well as spectacular new physical spaces designed to support science, the arts, athletics, wellness, and innovation. It also led to the creation of The Center for the Advancement of Girls, through which, in partnership with leading universities and nonprofit institutions, we have conducted original, girl-centered educational research, advancing best practices in educating girls. With those and other accomplishments as a backdrop, we look toward a future filled with possibility.

The **four strategic initiatives** outlined in the Plan – **Ignite Curiosity and Creativity, Energize Our Educators, Enrich Our Community, Secure Our Financial Future** – represent mandates from our community, communicated clearly and consistently by all of you in survey responses and community focus group discussions. Over the five-year life of the Plan, the work of our Board of Trustees, administration, and faculty will flow from the Strategic Initiatives. The Plan will be a living document – one that provides guidance and sets goals while remaining responsive to the rapidly-changing educational landscape we face. Implementation of the Plan will require the School's long-term commitment to translating the initiatives into concrete action steps. Some of this work has already begun, and we look forward to the exploration and dialogue that stem from transforming our collective vision into action.

This plan belongs to all of us. We hope every member of our community feels ownership and pride, as the Plan is a product of our community's opinions, reflections, suggestions, and aspirations gathered over the last year. We are inspired by the strong engagement and deep commitment evidenced by our community's input and insights. We offer deepest thanks for the efforts of so many.

This is an extraordinary moment for The Agnes Irwin School. Our increasingly globalized and interconnected world offers both enormous opportunity and significant challenge, requiring creative and bold thinking that will strengthen our community, provide our students with the critical skills necessary to thrive in a complex world, and demonstrate the immeasurable value that comes with an Agnes Irwin education. As we implement our Strategic Plan, we will reach for new heights in excellence and continue to carefully cherish our traditions, always remembering that the School sits on the shoulders of so many who came before. We are grateful to be launching our work from a position of strength. With the Plan as our guide, we will deepen our commitment to our mission, expand our opportunities, and secure our standing as a premier independent school for girls and a nationally-recognized leader in girls' education.

With enthusiasm and gratitude,

Wendy Hill, Ph.D., Head of School

Ann Laupheimer Sonnenfeld '77,
Chair, Board of Trustees

Jennifer Kinkead '84, Chair, Strategic
Planning Committee

The Process

Our strategic planning process has been a yearlong, community-wide effort that sought input from all members of our community, including students, parents, past parents, faculty, staff, administration, alumnae, and trustees. Data were gathered via online survey, focus groups, a town hall workshop, a two-day strategic thinking workshop, and feedback sessions.



1,348

Total number of participants who completed the strategic planning survey, including 488 parents and board members, 190 faculty and staff, and 678 alumnae

256

Members of our community, including students, who attended one of 13 hour-long focus-group sessions over four days

75

Participants who attended a two-day strategic thinking workshop, engaging in 12 hours of visioning exercises and strategic discussion sessions

81

Pages of flip charts and Google Docs recording comments from 17 separate strategy sessions during the Strategic Thinking Workshop



Our Mission



The Agnes Irwin School empowers girls to learn, to lead, and to live a legacy.



TO LEARN

Agnes Irwin provides girls with a deep foundation in the humanities, mathematics and science, wellness and athletics. In an inclusive setting that values diversity, students develop skills in critical and analytical thinking, self-expression, effective communication, and collaboration. A rich and varied approach to instruction, team and individual endeavors, inquiry, and assessment enables girls to solve problems, design solutions, create meaning, and prepare for a complex and challenging world.

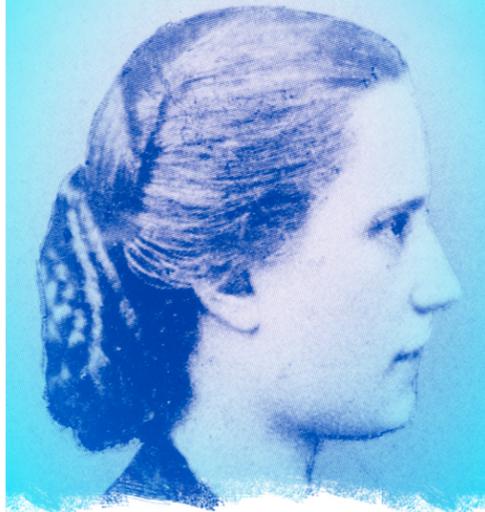
TO LEAD

We believe that all girls and young women have the capacity to lead and that leadership can take many forms. Therefore, through our instruction, our community interactions, and our daily choices, we affirm this belief and provide an environment that challenges girls to develop the core values of leadership: empathy, integrity, resilience, independent thinking, and commitment to action.

TO LIVE A LEGACY

Agnes Irwin students are a part of the global community of girls and women. They are also the trustees of our School's heritage and traditions. By adopting values that foster equity, justice, social responsibility, civic mindedness, and integrity, and by nurturing positive relationships and intentional decision-making, our students and alumnae engage in bold and meaningful ways to impact our interconnected world.

Our History



Approaching 150 years of being a changemaker in all-girls' education.

Our founder, Agnes Irwin, the great-great granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin, was among those early pioneers who believed in a robust education for girls and young women. A neophyte as a headmistress, the 28-year-old teacher accepted a request in 1869 to lead the schooling of the daughters of Philadelphia's civic and business leaders. Miss Irwin wanted to create an institution that emphasized "disciplined and precise thinking," where girls could flourish in a rigorous curriculum reserved at the time for boys, with studies in English, French, Greek, Latin, geography, mathematics, history, botany, and physics.

Miss Irwin valued academic study, and instilled in her pupils "a sense of the dignity of scholarship." She prepared students to sit for examinations that Harvard University offered to certify women for a profession in teaching. When Bryn Mawr College, one of the first institutions dedicated to the advanced education of women, was founded in 1885, she revised the curriculum to better prepare her students for admission there.

In 1894, Miss Irwin resigned her headship when asked to become the first Dean at Radcliffe College, but her 25 years of leadership produced a rich heritage: a legacy of intellectual achievement without limits and independent thinking for girls and young women that endures to the present day at Agnes Irwin.



Over the decades, The Agnes Irwin School has been led by 13 extraordinary women, including Miss Irwin's younger sister, Sophy Dallas Irwin, and other visionary leaders. After more than 60 years in Philadelphia (1869-1933), the school relocated to the city's western suburbs – first to the neighborhood of Wynnewood and finally in 1959 to its current 24-acre campus in Rosemont.



Class of 1892

The Agnes Irwin Girl



ENGAGED

JOYFUL

RESILIENT

INQUISITIVE

CONFIDENT

CURIOUS

PROBLEM SOLVER

PASSIONATE

DRIVEN

COLLABORATIVE

FEARLESS

RESPONSIBLE

ARTISTIC

ATHLETIC

WELL-ROUNDED AIS

RESPECTFUL

COURAGEOUS

A LEADER

OPTIMISTIC

ARTICULATE

CREATIVE

REFLECTIVE

THOUGHTFUL

GENEROUS

INTELLIGENT

TENACIOUS

AUTHENTIC

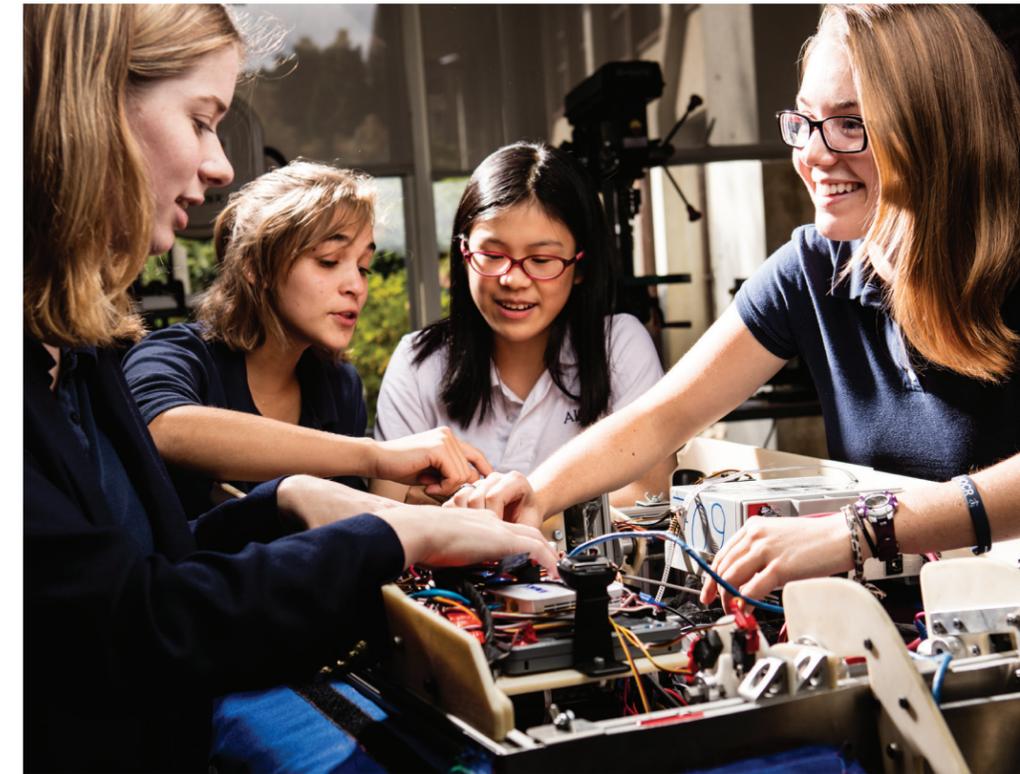
COMPASSIONATE

POWERFUL

OPEN-MINDED

CARING

Words used to describe an Agnes Irwin girl during the Strategic Thinking Workshop.



Our Goal

We have seen dramatic **change** in the world since the launch of our last Strategic Plan sixteen years ago.

Technological advances have brought profound shifts in the ways we share information, communicate, and acquire knowledge. Critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving are increasingly seen as the essential skills to solve the complex problems of our integrated, global society. To ensure our students are fully prepared to thrive in this ever-changing world, we must remain vigilant, keeping pace with advances that best serve our students and ensure the School's continued success.

At Agnes Irwin, we have long been focused on providing a rigorous and exceptional education for girls, both in the traditional domains of the sciences, humanities, and the arts, as well as in important co-curricular areas such as athletics, leadership development, critical thinking, and service to others. Just as Agnes Irwin girls are known for their confidence, creativity, intelligence, and compassion, we as an institution must strive to provide an environment that models those same qualities.

Based on original research conducted by our Center for the Advancement for Girls, we continue to evaluate how girls learn best. Research on girls' education confirms what we already knew – the value of leadership development, collaborative problem solving, and community connections. Some of the research has brought important areas into focus – the

importance of girls' wellness and emotional health, the value of grit and resilience, removing negative bias related to girls entering STEM fields, and the power of cross-cultural competency.

We live in a rapidly changing world and must change with it. That means investing in the people, tools, technologies, and resources that will help prepare and empower our girls to embrace the opportunities and challenges ahead.

To achieve this, our four key initiatives are to:

- **Ignite curiosity and creativity**
- **Energize our educators**
- **Enrich our community**
- **Secure our financial future**

With these four initiatives as our guide, we aim to broaden our vision for the future, building on our core strengths while finding new opportunities to advance and expand our distinctive programs and exceptional community.

Ignite Curiosity and Creativity

WE KNOW GIRLS. Our **Center for the Advancement of Girls** helps us address, evaluate, and create an Agnes Irwin experience that is what's best for girls. Via the Center's research, we create and implement innovative programs for girls. Shape classroom instruction through girl-centered research. And forge partnerships beyond the campus community that benefit our girls—and all girls—such as our annual STEM conference in collaboration with The Franklin Institute.

We commit that our girls will remain steeped in vigorous learning that engages their curiosity, their intellect, and their hearts.

Our students benefit from a strong, dynamic, multidisciplinary curriculum, coupled with myriad opportunities for success in the arts and athletics and balanced with a consistent focus on personal well-being and service to others. This multifaceted education will ensure that our students are prepared to explore new intellectual horizons, tackle complex real-world problems, and grow into the courageous leaders our world needs.

Our program will:

- **Focus on high-impact experiential learning.**

Experiential and inquiry-based educational practices deepen the learning process. In today's world, with easy and quick access to information, education is less and less about the inculcation of knowledge and more about how to foster the creation of it. We will build on our legacy of providing a strong foundation in the humanities, sciences, and arts by expanding investigative and hands-on learning opportunities throughout the curriculum. We will expand our distinctive cross-disciplinary programs, develop integrated cross-divisional curricula, and increase opportunities for student-centered, high-impact, innovative learning.

- **Empower girls to pursue their intellectual passions.**

Our program will allow our students to explore their intellectual passions and interests and ultimately curate their own learning. We will provide an environment that more fully realizes our mission to empower girls to learn through expanded independent research opportunities and applied learning in all academic disciplines.

- **Encourage civic and global engagement.**

To inspire them to transform the world, our girls need opportunities to engage with communities both inside and outside the School. Through community partnerships and signature programming, we will instill in our students the ethics and value of working towards the common good.

- **Cultivate leaders.**

Leadership can take many forms. The early cultivation of a leadership identity in a girl manifests itself when she confidently asserts that identity, knowing she not only belongs at the table, but brings an essential perspective to it. Through early and consistent development of leadership traits such as empathy, resilience, and self-compassion, we will foster in each girl the capacity to lead, wherever she chooses.

- **Be grounded in research.**

We will continue our research-driven approach to inform our teaching and create an educational journey throughout which our girls thrive. Through our Center for the Advancement of Girls, we will learn the latest in girl-centered pedagogy and translate this research into action.

IGNITING CURIOSITY AND CREATIVITY STARTS WITH OUR FACULTY. In anticipation of the strategic planning work that lies ahead, the School established a new framework for faculty collaboration and communication. In January 2016, the School launched two academic working groups: a **Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC)** that brings together faculty across divisions and departments to research, investigate trends, and recommend programmatic initiatives and enhancements; and an **Innovation Team (iTeam)** made up of Innovation Directors from the Lower, Middle, and Upper Schools. Together, the TLC and iTeam collaborate to implement TLC recommendations and bring our teachers' creative ideas to life in the classroom. Teachers and students are already enjoying room to explore and innovate in our recently completed Lower School iWonder Lab and Middle and Upper School STEAM Studio.

Energize our Educators

We commit to employ, retain, and recognize exceptional faculty and staff and create a vibrant learning environment where they can flourish.

We will empower them to explore, create, and collaborate so they develop their fullest potential as teachers and role models. We will attract inspiring and dynamic teachers, representing diverse backgrounds of thought, experience, and culture, and welcome them into a vibrant intellectual community.

Our faculty will:

- **Be empowered to explore and grow.**

The most vibrant schools have a culture of growth that encourages teachers to be catalysts for innovation and guides for engaged learning in the classroom. We will create ample time and opportunities for our faculty to grow as outstanding teachers and leaders, and we will further enhance our distinctive professional enrichment programs to support their development.

- **Be intellectual role models.**

The best teachers exemplify the intellectual exploration, fearlessness, and creativity we expect from our students. We will advance a teacher-scholar model that enables our educators to pursue their intellectual passions and amplifies the dynamic learning environment for our students.

- **Be rewarded and honored.**

Outstanding schools have outstanding teachers. Recognizing that exceptional teaching is the single most important factor associated with the quality of a school, we will ensure that our teachers are rewarded and honored for their extraordinary teaching and scholarship.

TEACHERS ARE THE HEART OF THE SCHOOL. That's why Agnes Irwin invests in teacher-driven initiatives. Our **Professional Growth Grants** provide funding for faculty to explore new ideas and bring these creative outcomes to the classroom. The results have been transformative. Our Classics Department has written a Latin textbook series that is specifically designed to engage and challenge girls. Members of our Science Department have reimaged a fifth grade science curriculum that is rooted in engineering, challenging girls to tackle real-world problems while nurturing an early interest in STEM fields. And our early childhood education team has used the Growth Grant program to design a premier preK/Kindergarten program that focuses on the early development of young girls.



Enrich our Community



EQUITY AND INCLUSION PHILOSOPHY

The Agnes Irwin School respects and values diversity, including but not limited to differences in age, ability, ethnicity, family structure, gender identity, national origin, physical attributes, race, religion, sexual orientation and socioeconomic level. We actively promote and develop a school community that is culturally competent, socially responsible and globally engaged.

OUR PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY

The Agnes Irwin School fosters an environment that represents many backgrounds, thereby building a community in which the contributions of all people are valued and respected.

- Approved by the Agnes Irwin Board of Trustees, September 4, 2011

We commit to being a truly inclusive, diverse, and equitable community by honoring the individuality of all our students and families, teachers, and staff.

We will celebrate our students' core identity as Agnes Irwin girls within a community that fosters and expects dignity, empathy, and mutual respect.

We will embrace, in our programs and interactions, the powerful benefit that comes from the free and civil exchange of ideas. Diversity of thought, background, experience, and perspective inspires broad and deep dialogue, which prepares our girls to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

We will:

- **Help each girl develop a positive sense of self.**

We believe every girl should take pride in her individuality. We will ensure that each of our students develops a positive sense of self during her Agnes Irwin experience, taking justifiable pride in her own unique identity, and her identity as an Agnes Irwin girl.

- **Actively recruit and retain families, faculty, administrators and staff of diverse backgrounds.**

Our students must see themselves reflected in our community. We will augment our recruitment and retention initiatives to promote and support a more diverse community of students and educators. We will focus our efforts to create an inclusive educational community where every member feels supported and heard.

- **Demonstrate the value we place on diversity, equity, and inclusion.**

Diversity of experience, thought, and ideas is not only a pillar of the School, but also an integral part of the learning process. In an increasingly complex and diverse world, it is imperative that our students are fully equipped with the cross-cultural competencies necessary to engage meaningfully in the global landscape. We will equip our students and our faculty, staff, and administration with the opportunities and tools to build an inclusive and equitable community.



Secure our Future

We commit to responsible management and growth of our financial resources to realize our goals and ensure our long-term financial sustainability.

Through careful stewardship of resources, continued growth in giving, targeted strengthening of our marketing and communication efforts, and sharp focus on strategic enrollment, we will build on our legacy of fiscal responsibility to ensure the continuation of Agnes Irwin's culture of excellence into the future.

We will:

• **Demonstrate our advantage.**

In the increasingly crowded and competitive arena of preK-12 independent schools, it is imperative that we clearly and powerfully demonstrate the unmatched value of an Agnes Irwin education. We will expand our communication efforts, both internally and externally, to highlight the distinct advantages and unparalleled opportunities found within our exceptional community.

• **Thoughtfully manage our financial operations.**

Our School must manage its financial operations with both discipline and ingenuity, taking an appropriately balanced approach to risk and reward. We will develop a sustainable, long-range financial plan that ensures ongoing support of our strategic initiatives.

• **Grow our endowment.**

It is critical that our endowment grows to ensure financial stability, opportunity, and intergenerational equity. We will focus on the growth of our endowment through careful cultivation of our existing resources and through the 150th Anniversary Celebration capital campaign.



• **Strengthen our tuition assistance program.**

The escalating costs of independent school tuition, coupled with a challenging economic environment, demand increased focus on access and affordability. Tuition assistance is a critical tool to allow more families the opportunity to experience an Agnes Irwin education. A robust, growing, and well-qualified applicant pool, along with high enrollment yield, will strengthen the School financially and continue to ensure a vibrant academic community. We will target fundraising and other financing options to support our commitment to increase access and affordability.

• **Expand and enrich our community.**

Geographic and demographic shifts in our region provide opportunities for us to engage new communities. Using our marketing, communication, and transportation resources, we will focus on recruiting families from untapped areas and underrepresented backgrounds and cultivate a supportive and inclusive environment where they can meaningfully engage and succeed.

• **Develop a comprehensive master facilities plan.**

Efficient and creative use of our facilities enables us to design high-impact learning environments that spark the intellectual growth of our girls. We will develop a comprehensive long-range master facilities plan that ensures the best use of our existing physical plant, provides state-of-the-art facilities for our curricular, co-curricular and athletic programs, and outlines a vision for future growth.

Translating our Vision into Action

Leading Girls' Education provides a bold and aspirational vision for Agnes Irwin's future, informed by a process of deep reflection and inquiry.

As a visionary document, this Strategic Plan is designed to chart a robust and broad course for the future, highlighting critical areas of focus and opportunity. Over the next five years, the School will embark on the important journey of translating the Plan's vision into action, looking for creative, innovative and effective approaches to meeting our goals. Under the direction of Head of School, Dr. Wendy Hill, and with guidance from the Board of Trustees, the School will pursue an

implementation plan that will bring our strategic vision to reality – working together to refine priorities, identify and implement specific strategies, and establish metrics to measure success. Like the strategic planning process, implementation will be a collaborative effort, requiring the commitment and contribution of a broad coalition of our community. We will establish a systematic process that ensures accountability and flexibility and provide regular updates to our community on progress.

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

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 Susan Burch (Trustee, Parent)
 Pat Coyne (Trustee, Parent)
 Alison Hastings (Parent, President of Parents' Council)
 Mariandl Hufford (Assistant Head of School, Director of CAG, Parent)
 Cathy Lynch (Faculty)
 David Marshall (Faculty)
 Susan Hirtle McEvoy '00 (Alumna)
 Anita McMullin '81 (Trustee, Alumna)
 Donna Page (Staff Member)
 Kristin Schinella (Trustee, Past Parent)
 Kim Walker (Faculty)

Ex-Officios:

Dr. Wendy Hill (Head of School, Parent)
 Ann Laupheimer Sonnenfeld '77 (Board Chair, Alumna, Past Parent)



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