



DE LA SALLE ACADEMY

Unveiling the Future: Year One of DLSA's Strategic Plan Adventure Begins

TRANSFORM: Learning, Leadership, and Legacy

LEARNING

Initiative: Strengthen an environment that supports community identity and wellbeing

1. Establish an academic support class
 - a. Starting in the fall of 2023, all sixth graders now take “Learning to Learn,” a course taught by our Director of Teaching and Learning. The class is designed to help students understand who they are as learners; learn strategies that help them learn how to learn; and apply those strategies to their current coursework at DLSA. In conjunction with “Introduction to Emotional Intelligence,” this class empowers Sixth graders to understand their own cognitive development and acquire strategies to help them thrive academically, socially, and emotionally at the beginning of their DLSA careers, positioning them for a lifetime of learning.
2. Revisit our food program
 - a. With roughly 60% of our students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, providing healthy, sustaining, and enjoyable breakfast, lunch and snacks is critical to our program. A Task Force has been assembled to carefully research food programs available, keeping in mind costs, equipment implications, and culturally diverse options with the hope to implement an enhanced program for the 2024-2025 academic year.
3. Create a DLSA Welcome Desk
 - a. We have built a Welcome Desk to ensure the safety of our community while also formalizing how we receive visitors to the School. We have hired two part-time employees, one of which is an alum of DLSA, to ensure that all guests are greeted and recorded.
4. Effectively communicate our mission in providing a world-class education regardless of a family's financial resources
 - a. We have developed strategic partnerships with local organizations that are aligned with our values and support our programming. These partnerships have resulted in enhancing our curriculum, including: the Frick Museum, Google, New York Public Library, Klingenstein Center at Teachers College, Music and the Brain, ROX Program for Girls, 100 Cameras, Judo

Academy, Atlantic Theatre Company, Doing Good Together, Legacy Community Solutions - to name just a few.

- b. We have committed to regularly updating our donor reports and marketing materials to ensure they are relevant and accurate, including the newly updated DLSA Video (launched in December 2023), DLSA View Book (distributed in September 2023), and website (updated in the fall of each year, and maintained throughout the year).
 - c. We have streamlined our communications including a community newsletter distributed quarterly; alum communications (throughout the year, as needed); a family newsletter distributed every other week; and a weekly faculty digest.
 - d. We have begun the initial phase in relaunching a Marketing and Communications Committee with trustees, alums, the Leadership Team, and faculty/staff, enabling us to strategically communicate the story of DLSA including solidifying our narrative and key phrases and highlighting impact stories to share. The Committee will be launched in the 2024-2025 academic year and will meet twice yearly.
5. Reinforce our mental health programming
- a. Under the guidance of our School Counselor, we have created opportunities for students to connect outside of traditional counseling, with the intention of strengthening a safer environment for our community through a comprehensive and preventative mental health program to serve all our students. Programs now include:
 - i. All sixth graders are required to complete “Introduction to Emotional Intelligence” which addresses community needs as well as coping strategies, communication skills, meditation, and mindfulness.
 - ii. In partnership with Dr. Kwame Scruggs and Alchemy, DLSA’s Assistant Head of School has begun drumming circles with Eighth grade boys, exploring identity and self awareness and breaking down myths.
 - iii. Trained by Girls Rox, DLSA’s School Counselor works with the Eighth grade girls to also explore identity and self awareness and empowerment.
 - iv. Our School Counselor also now leads After School Support Groups for the Seventh and Eighth grade, actively encouraging students to attend and participate and allowing the groups to identify what topics to explore in order to be responsive to student needs.
6. Enhance our weekly Community Meetings
- a. We are now aligning Community Meetings, which are held every Wednesday at the School throughout the academic year, with academic

programming, holiday celebrations, and concerns that arise within our community. In addition, beginning in the fall, there has been an increase in student facilitation at the meetings and an added effort to invite special guests to the meetings to present, including a performance by Harlem-based Los Pleneros de la 21.

7. Communicate our expertise in middle school education
 - a. In partnership with graduate students from Teachers College at Columbia University, we are gathering data on how we articulate how our curriculum is grounded in research on what middle school scholars need to learn, grow and flourish.
 - b. We are positioning ourselves as leaders in middle school education, through publications including an article on equity in gifted education for *The Christian Science Monitor* and the publication of our Head of School's research in *The Teachers College Record* and featured in *AXIS The Journal of LaSallian Higher Education*
 - c. Our Head of School was appointed as an Adjunct Professor at the Klingenstein Center at Teachers College, Columbia University
8. Communicate to the DLSA community our Strategic Plan on an annual basis, including specifically designed opportunities for current parents
 - a. We have begun a series of grade-specific Zoom sessions and coffee meetings for parents. These gatherings provided a personalized platform for transparent discussions on our progress with the Strategic Plan, ensuring that current parents are informed and aligned with our shared vision for the future.
9. Design and provide professional learning opportunities for faculty and staff
 - a. We are providing our faculty and staff with continual professional development opportunities that are based on cognitive neuroscience, developmental psychology, responsive teaching, restorative justice, and social-emotional learning. These opportunities lead to students' ability to learn in novel ways. To do so, we have begun creating dedicated space in our faculty and staff weekly meetings towards professional learning opportunities including:
 - i. Two workshops with Taina Coleman, M.A., M.Ed, of the Child Mind Institute, on best practices in supporting twice-exceptional learners in the classroom.
 - ii. A panel discussion on what we, as educators, need to understand about AI to best prepare and empower our students to thrive in an AI future. The panelists included Clay Shirky, Vice Provost for AI and Technology in Education at NYU, and De Angela Duff, Associate Vice Provost and Industry Professor in Integrated Design & Media at NYU.

- iii. We welcomed Max Stossel, Head of Education and Content for the Center for Humane Technology, to DLSA for a full day of presentations and conversations, separated by constituencies (faculty and staff, students, and families). Mr. Stossel invited our community to reflect on our social media and technology use and to, above all, be intentional about how we use our devices and the apps they contain.

LEADERSHIP

Initiative: Provide volunteer opportunities and community building events for current DLSA parents

10. By inaugurating the DLSA Family Life Committee, we are providing meaningful opportunities for parents to volunteer their time and expertise to the School. Based on data collected on parent/family expertise, degree of availability, and interests, the Family Life Committee has been launched to support school events through in-kind donations and volunteer opportunities including: special events, movie night, field trips, admissions events; and holiday celebrations.
11. We have improved communications to families about school programming and their access to them as well as how they can support DLSA and get involved, resulting in a diverse group of family volunteers at a range of events. An end of year survey will also be distributed to families regarding their experience at DLSA so that we can continually improve.
12. In the spring, we will launch borough-based local meet ups for current families to gather together and get to know each other in their own communities.
13. Working with Parents in Action, we are providing parent support groups twice a year and in both English and Spanish.

Initiative: Optimize the performance of the Leadership Team

14. We have hired a Director of Finance and Operations which has allowed the HoS to focus more on alum, fundraising and strategic initiatives, and has professionalized our Human Resource department and has built the capacity to a more data-informed approach to budgeting.
15. DLSA was honored to be selected by The Bridgespan Group, a global non-profit organization, to engage in professional development work that set out to guide us in optimizing the performance of the leadership team by formalizing strategic initiatives that support our leadership of the School; creating systems and structures that allow for more sustainable leadership; allowed us to dedicate meeting times towards to growing and learning as a team; and clarifying roles and responsibilities.

16. We are writing a crisis communications plan to address the safety of the School which will be launched in the fall of 2024. This communication will outline clear and effective communication strategies in the event of an emergency or crisis situation. The plan includes designated communication channels, key contacts, and predefined messages to be disseminated swiftly and accurately. The primary goal is to ensure that accurate and timely information reaches all stakeholders, including students, parents, faculty and staff, and the community, helping to minimize confusion and anxiety during a crisis. By proactively creating a crisis communications plan, the School can respond rapidly, maintain transparency, and demonstrate a commitment to prioritizing the safety and well-being of everyone involved.

Initiative: Launch a comprehensive and cost-effective health plan for faculty and staff

17. Led by a Compensation and Benefits Task Force made up of DLSA Trustees and faculty and staff, we are reevaluating how we support our faculty and staff through health benefits for the betterment of recruitment and retention, The goal is to provide a succinct supportive benefits plan that accurately and clearly articulates our compensation and benefits philosophy and options.

LEGACY

Initiative: Strengthen our connections to our alum community

18. Our mission is to visit every high school age alum at their school before they graduate. In our first year of this initiative, the Head of School, along with the Associate Director of Development, have visited five high schools so far (Xavier, Browning, Hackley, Cristo Rey, and Grace Church School) to strengthen our connection to our young alums. Already the feedback has been invaluable. Both our graduates and the administrators of their schools report that DLSA alums are well prepared for high school both academically and emotionally, and more importantly, they have a strong sense of self and are impressively comfortable interacting with adults.

19. We are strengthening a reciprocal relationship with our alums through alerting them of professional opportunities; reimagining alum events including our career panels and adding regional events in Philadelphia and Baltimore in the spring of 2024.

Initiative: Revisiting the DLSA Mission Statement

20. Building on research collected by graduate students at the Klingenstein Center and in consultation with our community, including current students, faculty and staff, and finally, the Leadership Team, we are in the process of rearticulating and updating our Mission Statement. The goal is to ensure that the Mission

Statement accurately reflects our current identity and values. The emphasis will be on telling the true story of DLSA and with a commitment to aligning the Mission Statement with our present state and goals of the School. Initial revisions have been drafted and will be shared with different constituencies this spring to elicit feedback.

Initiative: School sustainability

21. We have assembled a Financial Model Task Force to help make informed decisions for the tenable future of DLSA. The Task Force is conducting a thorough analysis of DLSA's revenue sources, expenses, and overall financial health. This involves an examination of tuition income, government funding, grants and foundations, as well as individual support. Furthermore, the Task Force will consider long-term financial planning, reserve funds, and the ability to adapt to changes in enrollment or economic conditions to ensure DLSA's ongoing financial stability.