

Summary: Self-Study Findings And Conclusions

- 1. What emerged from and was substantiated by the self-study process as the school's areas of greatest strength?**

A. Social/Emotional learning

Alumni, parents, teachers, and the speeches of the graduating 8th grade students consistently highlight how TBS pays attention to the development of the whole child, nurturing social/emotional growth as well as academic growth, and providing a safe environment for learning.

B. Culture of continuous learning and improvement

The school's emphasis on professional development, constant reflection, and striving to improve align with our vision as a learning-centered school. Noting the pace and frequency of change in the past 10 years, it is clear TBS is not mired in a particular way of doing things, but has increasingly introduced best practices based on research into instruction, curriculum, and organizational systems.

C. Community voice

There is a history in our community of all members--students, teachers, staff, parents--having a voice, beginning in the days of community governance. While this has changed as roles and boundaries have become more defined and professional, there is a shared value in giving our community opportunities to speak, even when opinions differ.

For example, in younger grades student interest drives emergent curriculum, and older students are expected to "own" their learning, leading student-parent-teacher conferences, for example. Teachers have a say in curriculum development, hiring processes, and their own professional development, and all teachers and staff contributed to the writing of this accreditation self-study.

- 2. What new and useful information about the school was generated by research or discussions associated with the self-study process? What did the school discover**

about itself?

A. Use of data

Like many independent schools, we are caught in the struggle of meeting the needs of financial stability, financial needs of families, and program. In addition, we wrestle with ways to balance the curriculum to make certain all students are well prepared. All of these issues could be informed by better use of data, such as assessment data, enrollment data, financial data.

We have not been consistent about collecting data across time, and it is often not clear who should evaluate data we do collect, and what they should do with the analysis. For example, although we collected data on student ethnicity/race, no one had ever analyzed this data. When we did this for the accreditation self-study, we found that student and teacher ethnic diversity was a relative strength of the school.

B. Clarifying & documenting roles & responsibilities

While writing the self-study, it became clear that there is still ambiguity in the administration about who is responsible for what, and a strong need to document systems and define job descriptions in ways that are meaningful and sustainable. Much of the knowledge of the school resided in people rather than in documents, and without formal evaluation systems, job descriptions lacked grounding in reality. Now that we have a new evaluation system in place, and more documentation in the self study, we can fill in gaps that were revealed.

C. Health & Safety needs attention

In reviewing our preparation for large-scale natural disasters, such as fire and earthquake, we realized that the last disaster response training for staff was in 2006. In addition, the school had no system to regularly inventory and replace food and water stores and classroom first aid kits at both campuses. Access to these stores was also impeded by the building of a bike path by the city. These issues were recently resolved in the short term by inventorying and restocking supplies and training administrative staff. A more thorough review and implementation of safety preparations for disasters will be completed in summer of 2014 in consultation with contractors.

3. In drawing upon the analysis of issues and the identification of future work contained in the various self-study chapters, what would the school now designate as its most important five to eight institutional strategic priorities for the next several years?

A. Coherent, comprehensive curriculum & instruction review

Strengthening and articulating our program by developing defined processes for curriculum and instruction review is a major goal of the school. We created an ongoing structure for curriculum documentation to reflect what is actually taught in the classroom, and began an instructional coaching program and teacher evaluation process to ensure that the various pedagogic models teachers use are implemented with reliability and validity.

A major effort to document the math and science curriculum is underway this year in the elementary and Middle School; curriculum mapping for other subjects is in various stages of completion. This has led to increased interdisciplinary collaboration, as well as teachers learning from each other as they plan and share assessments. For example, as teachers reduce redundancies in science curriculum across grades, we have found instructional space for new kinds of inquiry, technology design and service.

More intensive work will be necessary over the next several years to provide baseline documentation, and this work will continue as we continually review and improve the curriculum.

B. Technology

TBS lacks a plan for technology education and sufficient infrastructure, although technological understanding is one of our learning outcomes. Teachers, parents, alumni, and students indicated in surveys that this was an area lacking sufficient support. In order to meet these needs, we believe TBS should come up with a comprehensive plan for incorporating technology into learning experiences that includes:

1. improving hardware and software infrastructure, particularly at the ECC--most teacher and student computers are outdated;
2. providing increased information technology support, to keep things running smoothly;
3. creating a technology curriculum map, likely with help from a professional technology education specialist, detailing skills and understandings at each grade level; and
4. providing professional development and ongoing support to improve teachers' ability to integrate technology education approaches in the classroom, and to teach information literacy skills.

C. Retention

Chronic issues with retention have been a drain on the school for many years. As students and families leave our community, connections are broken, resulting in "churn" as we say goodbye and welcome new families at each grade level. On a practical level, under-enrollment forces the Admissions office to work year-round to fill openings with rolling admissions, taxing limited resources, and requiring classrooms to host visits year round of prospective students and families.

The causes of our retention issues are complicated, but perception of the program, and its ability

to “ignite curious minds,” is likely part of the equation. TBS is compared to other independent and public schools in the East Bay, which in general have more facilities and programs to offer, and the value proposition in difficult economic times is scrutinized carefully each year by many families.

Determining families who are a “good fit” for our school is another issue that we have tried to address, for example, ensuring we can adequately support the breadth of neurodiversity in our classrooms.

Another key aspect is the amount of financial aid offered. In 2012 the school made a decision to decrease the number of families and amount of assistance offered to increase the sustainability of the school long term, which caused some families to depart. Balancing the financial stability of the school with the financial needs of the families will be critical to solving this issue.

D. Use and management of data

As mentioned in 2a above and in Chapter 16, TBS must address the school’s big-picture relationship to the very concept of data, for example, in how the school’s databases are organized; how teachers record and use student assessment data; how students and families interpret student growth data; how financial data are shared with faculty and staff; how alumni and development data are recorded; how admissions data are tracked; and how the Board uses data to drive generative, strategic, and fiduciary decision-making. By putting regular processes into place to gather and manage data, and determining who and how they will evaluate data, TBS should be in a position to make better-informed decisions to better fulfill our mission.

E. Clarifying & documenting roles & responsibilities

We described in answer 2b above that determining and documenting roles, responsibilities, decision making processes, and organizational systems in the administration will be important to meet the needs of finances, human resources, facilities, health, safety, and wellness.

F. Revising the bylaws

The current governance Bylaws state that Trustees are selected and elected by the Board (self-perpetuating) and by a majority vote of the membership (defined as all faculty, administration and members of the parent community). Since the Board has in practice been self-perpetuating since 2008, the school’s practices and Bylaws need to be brought into alignment, which requires a vote of the full community (parents, teachers, administration). The Board and administration have agreed to revisit these changes and follow through with the revision by 2015.

G. Master site plan

The Site committee has discussed creating a master site plan for the past few years, to help us plan how to meet programmatic needs and make the most of our sites given our constraints. For example, the ECC has required a new space for many years to better meet the needs of our youngest students, like during afternoon nap time. Creating a master site plan and finding creative ways to fund building initiatives should be a priority in the next few years.

H. Fewer goals

One downside to our learning-centered ethic of continuous improvement described in 1b above is that the school is often overambitious, overloading ourselves with initiatives, which can be draining to everyone in the community. For example, in 2013-14 TBS has major initiatives concerning math, science, and social-emotional learning curriculum and instruction development (including intensive K-5 mindfulness), community engagement and partnership, diversity and inclusion, and faculty/staff evaluation. This has led to fatigue and diluted efforts, as teachers and administrators have insufficient time to make progress in these many directions. Determining processes for prioritizing initiatives is critical for our school's success.