



COMMONWEALTH ACADEMY
Strategic Plan
2004-2009

EMPOWER THE CHILD.

from the board

DEAR FRIENDS OF COMMONWEALTH ACADEMY,

We are pleased to present you with the Commonwealth Academy Strategic Plan for 2004-2009. This plan had its origins at the Board of Trustees' retreat in May 2004 and has been an important element of the Board's activities since that time. The plan celebrates our substantial growth and development over the past three years and sets out a coherent vision for our future. The plan is built on six key strategic priorities that are defined and presented simply and directly. These priorities must be understood and embraced by our Board, our faculty and administration, our parents, students, and the community that we serve. The priorities are ambitious, but they are not unrealistic.

Commonwealth Academy has already begun to make progress in executing the initiatives that flow from our goals and priorities, and we welcome your enthusiasm and your help as we pursue our vision. The careful and focused work that we undertake during the next three years will enhance the academic, financial and community growth and development of Commonwealth Academy.

We need the support of the entire Commonwealth community to implement our Strategic Plan and accomplish its goals. The Strategic Plan is a living document and we look forward to your ideas to enhance and amend it as time and events require. You can be assured that the faculty and administration and the Board are fully committed to the vision of our future embodied in the Plan. We are grateful for your ideas and support.



Donald C. Klawiter
Donald C. Klawiter
Chair, Board of Trustees

Susan J. Johnson
Susan J. Johnson, PhD
Head of School

introduction

HISTORY & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Founded almost eight years ago, Commonwealth Academy has developed into a vibrant learning environment for students in grades six through twelve with organizational, learning and attention differences who have the capability and interest in pursuing a college education. Students who learn better in small classes and with individualized attention also benefit substantially from the program.

As Commonwealth Academy prepares to enter the next phase of its development and growth, the Board of Trustees has prepared this first-ever Strategic Plan. The Head of School and members of the board view strategic planning as a way to help Commonwealth Academy chart a course for the future and enable it to secure the resources it needs to grow and thrive.

Commonwealth Academy has accomplished much in its relatively short history.

- ▶ It is financially stable, as evidenced by its fiscal responsibility of funding ongoing operations through tuition and fund raising and repaying 20% of its building debt this year.
- ▶ It has stable leadership at the Board level, as evidenced by many Board members now serving their second three-year terms, and the Head of School serving her third year and just beginning a three-year contract.
- ▶ It is supported by excellent infrastructure including a newly remodeled building that is undergoing continuing improvement and top-notch technology offerings including graphic arts programs and computer based learning.
- ▶ It is increasing its visibility within the learning community through sponsorships of training and seminar events.
- ▶ It is clearly meeting an educational need in the Greater Washington area. Enrollment has grown to 73 students and some classes are now at capacity. It has graduated 18 students, 16 in the last two years, almost all of who are now pursuing college or some type of higher education.

CHALLENGES

As with any new institution, Commonwealth Academy faces some growing pains and challenges. Specifically, it needs strategies to manage its growth, promote diversity, develop its next generation of Board leadership, retain and develop its young faculty and plan for further expansion of its facilities as its growth continues.

Commonwealth's vision for its future and comprehensive Strategic Plan will be vital tools in helping the Academy meet the challenges in the years ahead. The Plan is the road map that guides the organization's daily activities as well as its long-term plans.

PHILOSOPHY

We provide the opportunity for capable students with learning disabilities and ADHD to succeed in a college preparatory curriculum through accommodations and technology within an academically challenging and socially supportive environment.

CORE VALUES

- ▶ **Character** – We purposefully promote appropriate conduct and expect all students to accept responsibility for their actions and understand the impact their actions have on others.
- ▶ **Uniqueness** – By maintaining a low student-teacher ratio and promoting a personal approach to a student's school experience, we support each student's unique academic, social and emotional needs to develop them into accomplished and confident individuals.
- ▶ **Opportunity** – We believe that a student's growth is best fostered through exposure to a broad range of academic pursuits, fine and performing arts, and the ability to pursue areas of interest. We require all students to engage in these pursuits.
- ▶ **Achievement** – We encourage self-awareness and self-acceptance so students may build the sense of mastery and competence to take risks and be challenged academically and personally and strive for excellence in their personal pursuits.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE: COMMONWEALTH ACADEMY IN 2009

In 2009, Commonwealth Academy is highly regarded in the Greater Washington area for its quality program, which features a college preparatory curriculum that reflects the abilities of its student body. The curriculum emphasizes core subjects as well as fine and performing arts, foreign languages, and physical education within a technically state-of-the-art school environment. The School remains loyal to its mission to educate capable diverse learners by providing an integrated course of study in an environment that both nurtures and challenges the students.

The composition of the student body, faculty and Board reflects the School's ongoing commitment to embrace diversity, while fostering the strong relationships and effective partnerships Commonwealth Academy has with its parent body, its alumni, and the Alexandria community. As a result of increased community financial support, the Academy has expanded its one-building campus to include a 6,500 square foot extension that serves as its Middle School. School enrollment is at capacity with qualified applicants at each grade level. Commonwealth Academy graduates continue to advance to post-secondary institutions, including two- and four-year colleges, according to the student's personal plan.



The Rock Climbing Club, one of several Wednesday afternoon clubs, gives students the opportunity for fellowship, team building, leadership, and enjoyment of personal interests.

The six key strategic priorities, inspired by our mission, core values, and long-term vision, will be executed by the school within a three-year time frame. The Plan will be reviewed periodically throughout each year and revised and updated annually at the Board's retreat. Strategic priorities and initiatives will be dropped or added as circumstances dictate.

SIX KEY STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- ▶ Continue to develop, refine and implement an educational program consistent with our philosophy.
- ▶ Maintain and attract excellent faculty, administrators and staff.
- ▶ Strengthen relationships within the school and with the outside community.
- ▶ Plan facilities that will grow and develop with our student body.
- ▶ Strengthen the financial position of the school.
- ▶ Continue to promote our program to capable students, to potential donors and to the community.

Middle schoolers study Newton's third law of motion, action-reaction, in Physical Science class.



Josh Gwilliam, Dean of Students, presents a Certificate of Merit to an honor roll student.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Continue to develop, refine and implement an educational program consistent with our philosophy.

RATIONALE

Commonwealth Academy is committed to providing an exceptional school experience for our students. Success in this endeavor relies on a curriculum rooted in the mission and core values of the Academy and supported by state-of-the-art technology and personal commitment of the faculty. To be most effective, the academic program should be constantly reviewed, revised, and enhanced to respond to the unique academic and social needs of our students.

THREE YEAR INITIATIVES

- ▶ Create a committee of faculty and educational experts to review our college preparatory program offerings in relation to other independent high schools in the Greater Washington area for content and technology.
- ▶ Create a faculty committee to focus on the middle school curriculum and cross-curricular components and the transition to our high school.
- ▶ Expand our program by which the Head and senior staff regularly and consistently observe, counsel and train faculty on both academic skills development and meeting the individual needs of our community of diverse learners.
- ▶ Educate the faculty in techniques and individual approaches to our diverse learners.
- ▶ Expand the off-campus learning and social opportunities across the grade levels.



Students and faculty join in for a balloon toss at the Belle Haven Park Field Day where they launched their "fleet" of rowboats.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Maintain and attract excellent faculty, staff and administrators.

RATIONALE

From its beginnings, Commonwealth Academy has succeeded because of the commitment, expertise, and character of its faculty, administrators, and staff. Commonwealth recognizes the students' relationships with faculty help to define the students' experiences, and maintaining deeply committed, highly competent employees is essential to the school's future. Commonwealth has made significant advancements in teacher salaries and learning opportunities and is competitive among area schools; however, the school needs to sustain this progress to retain and attract the most qualified personnel.

THREE YEAR INITIATIVES

- ▶ Form a task force of Board members and faculty to assess and make recommendations on the current competitiveness of Commonwealth's compensation package, as bench marked against the AISGW and VAIS data.
- ▶ Reassess the current budgeting for professional development and evaluate the possibilities of enhancing this funding by supporting advanced degree work and curriculum-enhancing professional development of teachers.
- ▶ Create advancement opportunities for our qualified and interested faculty members to encourage their personal growth, help them to take ownership with the development of the school and retain them as experienced teachers in future years.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Strengthen relationships within the Academy and with the outside community.

RATIONALE

Commonwealth Academy values its healthy relationships between home and school and with the local community. Parent participation in the life of the school provides essential support for Commonwealth and solidifies the home/school partnership. While the Academy has enjoyed solid support from its parents, Commonwealth would like to enhance the positive sentiment parents have for the school. Likewise, Commonwealth values its place in the local community and recognizes the necessity of maintaining and enhancing positive relations with our neighbors, while serving as a contributing member of the Greater Washington educational community.

THREE YEAR INITIATIVES

- ▶ Inspire an increased number of parents to participate in the life of the Academy and support it through volunteerism.
- ▶ Increase the range of perspectives and backgrounds on the Board by recruiting a diverse pool of Board members who bring various talents and viewpoints.
- ▶ Foster and strengthen the relationship Commonwealth has with its alumni.
- ▶ Provide Commonwealth constituencies and the local community with timely and effective communications regarding school matters and offer regular avenues for input and dialogue.
- ▶ Become a more active member of the local community and look for increased opportunities to showcase Commonwealth and its students in the Alexandria community and in the Greater Washington Area.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Plan facilities that will grow and develop with our student body.

RATIONALE

Commonwealth Academy facilities have been upgraded substantially in the past three years to accommodate the increased number of students and meet their corresponding needs. The Win-Win Computer Graphics Lab provides state-of-the-art digital photography, web design and graphics to our high school students. Improvements to the building—lockers and flooring—have been comprehensive. As Commonwealth grows to capacity, it will acquire additional space and physically separate the Middle School and High School facilities.



Students explore their artistic vision in our state-of-the-art computer graphics lab.

THREE YEAR INITIATIVES

- ▶ Assess the feasibility of expanding the school building.
- ▶ Pending the outcome of the feasibility study, obtain approval from the City of Alexandria and begin to implement the expansion.
- ▶ Anticipate the cost and timing of the expansion by establishing a three-year plan for expansion and funding.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Strengthen the financial position of the school.

RATIONALE

Commonwealth Academy recognizes that prudent financial management and adequate financial resources are imperative to the health of the school. While the level and breadth of support among the Commonwealth community has increased and the school has received healthy financial reviews, the Academy needs to continue to increase its non-tuition funding in order to achieve its short-term plans and long-term vision.



High schoolers present "In The Beginning," one of the many outstanding performances staged for parents, friends and fellow students.

THREE YEAR INITIATIVES

- ▶ Achieve 90% or greater participation and raise \$150,000 in annual fund giving in 2006.
- ▶ Explore and implement innovative fund raising efforts to complement the current practices and bring more parents and community members into the efforts.
- ▶ Foster and strengthen the relationship Commonwealth has with its alumni.
- ▶ Pending the outcome of the feasibility study for the facility expansion, raise appropriate funds to support the current needs of the Academy (i.e., address building needs).
- ▶ Maintain 100% coverage of operating budget from tuition and fees through the expansion process.
- ▶ Increase financial aid to 5% of tuition by 2006 to support the needs of our current families and to make Commonwealth Academy a viable option for a wider range of new families.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Continue to promote our program to capable students, to potential donors and to the community.

RATIONALE

From 2002-2003, enrollment at Commonwealth Academy increased by 23% while enrollment from 2003-2004 increased by 15%. If growth continues at the 15% rate, enrollment capacity will be reached by 2006. Growth has been due primarily to recommendations from parents to parents and referrals by educational consultants. To sustain this progress and attract the most qualified students, growth must be consistent and the pool of appropriate candidates must be enlarged.



THREE YEAR INITIATIVES

- ▶ Assess and make recommendations on the current marketing strategies, utilizing experts, where appropriate, to develop effective strategies.
- ▶ Evaluate the effectiveness and accuracy of our current marketing materials, including our website, by intensive use of surveys, interviews and expert advice.



Top: Students write in their English journals during a field trip to the Edgar Allan Poe house. Below: Middle schooler proudly displays his work at the annual science fair.

board of trustees & faculty

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Field trips are an integral part of Commonwealth's interactive curriculum. Here, Kat Frazier and class discuss their day touring DC museums and monuments.



EMPOWER THE MIND.



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ACADEMY

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Commonwealth students demonstrate their rowing prowess on the Potomac River in their sea worthy handcrafted, hand painted row boats.