

2014 Strategic Planning Jam Recap

November 2014

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What if? Reimagining the integrated student experience

The vibrant conversation among Jam participants from across the community offers ample evidence of the commitment of parents, faculty, and current and past students to the strategic course of the school. Program priorities are well embraced, and there is a widely shared interest in continuing to shape each student's experience so that he or she develops the skills and character traits essential today and tomorrow.

Indeed, the MICDS community is experiencing a challenging, albeit cutting edge, tension. On the one hand the community recognizes that there are new and compelling competencies required by the environment that graduates will face, widening even further the skills and character traits that students must develop while enrolled. On the other hand student time is already spoken for if not overtaxed and curricula are richly challenging but, arguably, "packed."

A potential strategic approach to this challenge emerges from a wide range of ideas expressed in the Jam. The core concept builds on the MICDS commitment to the integration of curricular and co-curricular, particularly athletic, experiences. It calls on the school to be even more intentional and inclusive in its embrace of co-curricular activities so that the broadened array of skills, competencies and traits desired of and appropriate to students in each division can be met through an integrated reimagining of the student experience. The lines distinguishing

curricular and co-curricular experiences would fade in favor of a design where each opportunity is conceived to impart and build a set of intellectual and interpersonal skills (for example, problem solving, grit, resilience, communication in all facets, collaboration, empathy and appreciation of multiple perspectives).

This approach is at play now in many aspects of the MICDS curriculum, including the wide use of project-based learning, "unanswerable questions," service learning, athletic coaching, and more. The opportunity identified in the Jam is to intensify coordination and collaboration across divisions and to look at all student options with less of an eye to affording opportunities and more toward creating a structure that fosters specific kinds of learning and skill development. This implies an even deeper partnership between families and the school, which the Jam suggests would be welcomed.

Many independent schools are examining the compelling need to prepare students for the technology-framed global stage on which they will almost inevitably walk. Enriching curricular and co-curricular content is a common focus; however, MICDS seems unusually well positioned, culturally and by dint of prior work, to take a deep and holistic view of the student experience from JK through 12 and potentially to reap tremendous value for students from the entire program.

JAM Participation

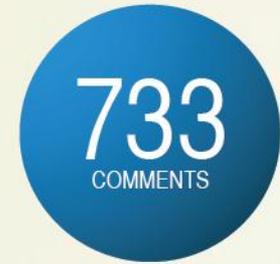
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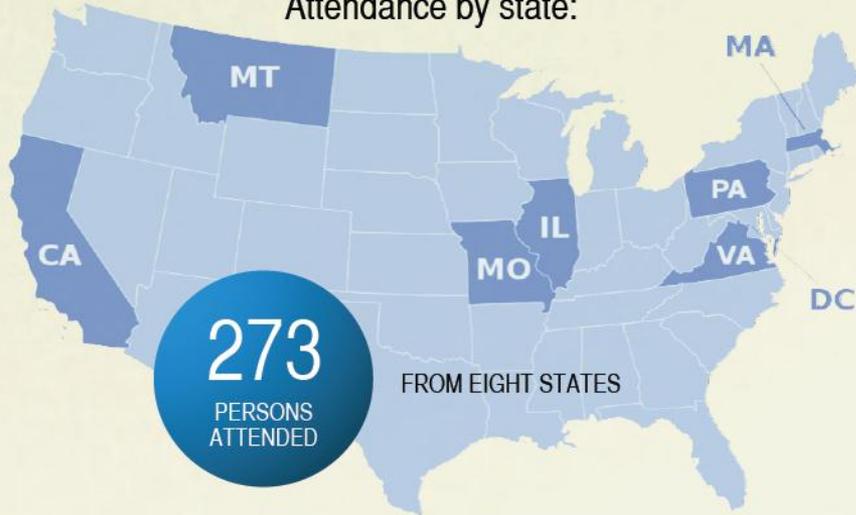
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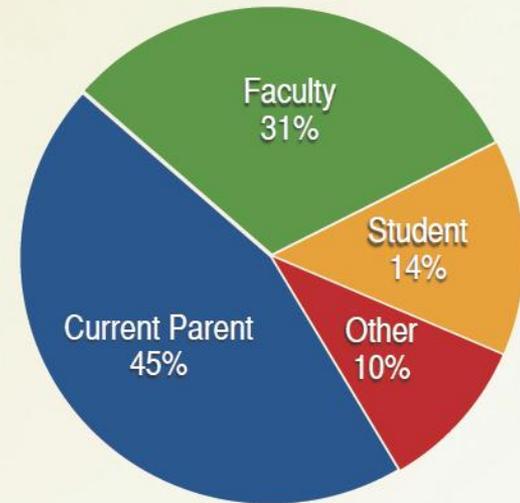
CONTRIBUTING
A TOTAL OF



Attendance by state:



Attendance by affiliation:



1. What we value in an MICDS education

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In the many expressions of appreciation for the school's principled dedication to educating the whole child, four key aspects of enduring value emerged from the discussion:

- Academic rigor tailored to the needs of the individual student
- Variety in educational approaches grounded in neuroscience and research on learning
- Curricular and co-curricular experiences designed to develop personal qualities and community values
- Diverse perspectives represented through curricula and the make-up of the community

MICDS is a special place because of the ***talented teachers*** whose dedication to our children and passion for life long learning provide a welcoming environment each day of school. My children have experienced faculty and the MICDS community demonstrates characteristics such as ***integrity, thoughtfulness, work ethic and creativity*** that will continue to shape their lives in a positive way. We are fortunate to have an honor code and mission statement as guiding principles as they are a part of the fabric of MICDS that our students – and their families – will carry with them long after they leave MICDS.

T. Walsh

I value that as a community ***we teach students to understand themselves as learners.***

M. Ploszay

I believe our strength is truly reflected in our ability to ***care for and educate the whole child.*** Not only do we as a faculty strive to provide an academic environment that is appropriate yet challenging academically, we strive to provide an atmosphere of caring and kindness.

C. Baumann

I thought MICDS was very challenging when it came to balancing school work/athletics/personal interests. There was so much to do, but when I got to college I felt like ***I had a leg up on others who had not had to learn time management.*** It was tough going thru MICDS, but I feel like I benefited from the stress.

S. Hayes

Quotations throughout this brief are from the online MICDS Jam held October 9, 2014.

For the MICDS affiliation of individuals quoted, see [page 32](#).

① Academic rigor tailored to the needs of the individual student

Brute rigor, I think, is among the principal table stakes for any school that seeks to be considered a *top college preparatory...*

B. Polk

I most value *great teachers*. A teacher can have the most lasting impact on a child's educational experience. A great teacher goes the extra mile, believes in a student, *challenges, sets high standards, knows when to push and when to nurture/support*.

M. Cohen

Being *attuned to kids' developmental stages and differing strengths/weaknesses* is important. My daughter ... feels valued as a community member for a variety of strengths; she also feels that faculty and administrators see her weaknesses as developmentally appropriate challenges to be worked through together. I'd hate to lose this quality in a "race to the top". I believe that academically advanced students have plenty of opportunities to challenge themselves at MICDS, but that students who aren't as advanced at this particular stage of their development have a place at the table too.

K. Virant

② Variety in educational approaches grounded in neuroscience and research on learning

Another strength of school is that teachers address their instruction thinking about the whole child: physically, cognitive and emotionally.

We teach with brain research as our framework.

S. Villagomez

I think we talk a lot about this in terms of ***building relevancy*** –

Everything we have learned from all the brain books we have read says relevance is necessary to move things to long-term memory. We are doing better at connecting things to real world things and trying to make connections.

E. Helfant

As a teacher, I've been so pleased with the uptick in our language regarding noncognitive skills (grit, resilience, teamwork) and Dweck's "Growth Mindset" theory. This helps ***give our students a framework and a vocabulary for discussing challenges and triumphs during the learning process.*** (And in nonacademic pursuits!) I'd like to see MICDS continue to build gutsy, robust, risk-taking students who value innovation, truth-telling, and divergent thinking.

M. Clark

Something I value as a teacher is the ability to ***connect with teachers across grade levels*** and divisions to discuss how to best meet the needs of our students. We are continually collaborating with each other and sharing our ideas and expertise.

D. Waters

I believe that the ***social emotional growth of students is inextricably linked to their academic success.*** We know from recent research that attention paid at all ages of students in all curricular areas makes a difference for those students. Sometimes those teaching connections are easier to see in the Lower School or in the arts.

J. McMillion

3 Curricular and co-curricular experiences designed to develop personal qualities and community values

I reflect back on how MICDS always asked me *to engage in all things with curiosity*, calling me and my peers to do more than just live in the world. The expectation was to question it; interact in it with compassion and a strong moral resolve; and – ultimately – change it where there are opportunities or needs to do so.

S. McNally

I value MICDS as an *international community*. My kid's experience grows when getting to know people from other countries.

N. Navarrine

I am a parent of a 2010 grad and a current senior. While they both have had exposure to excellent academics, what has turned out to be formative in both cases has been the experiences that each had *outside the core curriculum*.

For one child, it was the exposure to the music program and the district/state performance opportunities; for the other, it has been through development as a scholar-athlete, which has been facilitated by outstanding coaching. I think the strength of MICDS is in the way in which the students are presented and encouraged to pursue these opportunities.

D. Ory

Academics are undoubtedly a strength at MICDS, but I'd like to touch on an equally important factor in the development of its students: *co-curricular programs*....These out of the classroom activities have not only built up my collaboration, time-management, critical thinking, and leadership skills, but have also been *instrumental to my development as a person and student as a whole*.

I. Oulamine

4 Diverse perspectives represented through curricula and the make-up of the community

In Grade JK, our daughter became very comfortable with herself within the MICDS community and began to feel as though this is where she fit in. I believe this is due largely to the ***diversity of the school and the diversity within the curriculum.***

S. Stapleton

My senior daughter is taking a ***Global Online Academy*** course this trimester...via MICDS. Kids from all over the world are "taking" the same class. They set up ***skyping sessions to work on group projects.*** It has been fun and interesting for her to have that added component. One student is in Jordan – an 8 hour time difference...yet the kids are working on a project together! Very cool...

A. Zimmerman

Not only are we a community with students from all over the world, but we are diverse in so many other ways as well. We have a community who celebrates different religions, speaks different languages and comes from a wide variety of backgrounds. I believe this helps all of the students by providing them with ***conversations full of different views and insights*** ultimately resulting in deeper awareness and thinking.

K. Friedman

One way we celebrate the different cultures represented by our families is through the ***MICDS International Expo.*** We had over 40 countries represented at the Expo two years ago and are well on our way to that number for the upcoming Expo in January 2015. It is a wonderful event that brings all our families together to share their cultures and traditions with the community.

E. Hamill

2. How we build on MICDS strengths and continue to shape students who are exceptionally prepared for advanced study and beyond

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The second part of this brief suggests areas of focus and implementation that emerge from an analysis of the full Jam, across all topics discussed. We first address which skills and character traits merit focus, and then how MICDS, as a community, can build those skills and traits effectively.

Confident, critical thinking based on knowledge, as well as the ability to know what we don't know and find out, are essential attributes for successful students and the adults they will become. Equally as important, respect for each other and empathy are central to the educated person. And never forget the inherent joy in learning by oneself and with others.

E. Gilbert

2. How we build on MICDS strengths and continue to shape students who are exceptionally prepared for advanced study and beyond

Which skills and character traits merit focus?

① Creative problem solving: the capacity to develop, test, refine and communicate hypotheses

I work in an industry that is undergoing radical transformation due to both technology and design. The ability to ***evolve and figure out problems without a playbook*** is vital.

G. Polce

For today's digital natives, that technological playing field has been leveled, and the new differentiator— ironically— will be those who can leverage their 'traditional' skills in order to share their ideas with a larger audience. As we focus on STEM, let us also remember the ***critical role that the humanities play in shaping tomorrow's fully educated student.***

J. Carpenter

In 4th grade, we've just started posing “***unanswerable***” ***questions*** to the students- ones that don't necessarily have a correct answer, but require the students to think deeply and explore ways to find an answer.

C. Brennan

It's important that as an institution we identify quantifiable skills that we see our students as needing to be successful in the future. At the same time we also need to support students in developing a genuine ***love of the entire problem solving process*** — especially when it takes time, determination, resilience and overcoming setbacks — to reach a genuine solution.

L. Huxley

② Analytical thinking and information assessment: the capacity to understand complexity and discern what is important

With more and more communications and information clutter out there, it seems important that we help arm students with the ability to ***evaluate information and think critically*** about what they are hearing. So maybe what is necessary is teaching students to ask better questions and evaluate answers more critically.

T. Naber

What students need to be prepared for is dealing with, ***managing, and evaluating the information*** that is everywhere around them. So skills like website evaluation, finding authoritative sources, and synthesizing information from a variety of sources are the things that young people will have to know how to do well in order to succeed in the 21st century.

C. Williamson

3 Culture and gender awareness and empathy: the capacity to seek to understand diverse perspectives

Awareness of self and others is a key skill for the future in my book. *Knowing one's strengths and weaknesses*, persisting through weak areas to build strengths, and recognizing where others are strong and can lend a collaborating hand or where they may need an empathetic heart are timeless skills for any generation.

A. O'Toole

When we talk about global awareness, we seriously don't have to look more than 10 miles to find poverty, hunger and intense health and racial disparities that mirror situation around the world. *Can we extrapolate what kids learn here about our neediest neighborhoods into a global perspective?*

N. Cambria

I have always thought that *classroom partnerships with students from other local schools* is a big missed opportunity. Sitting with peers from the local area, but from different communities, to discuss some of these significant issues could really help to break down some barriers and provide further understanding.

M. Essman

I believe that middle and high schools are in a good position to start a discussion of *what healthy male/female relationships can look like*. This will be happening in the future – would be nice to see MICDS on the cutting edge of this.

K. Virant

4 Collaborative leadership: the capacity to engage deeply and productively with others to reach a goal

No matter what job they are in, they need to be able to ***lead as well as follow, be team players, be great problem solvers, be able to learn from the past*** and analyze how that affects current and future situations. They also need to be good listeners, and be able to connect with all types of people.

L. Guirl

There is an opportunity to help link diverse people in collaboration, test innovative concepts, think differently, be open to new ideas and test these ideas. This is building ***capacity for transformation rather than leadership***, but both are inextricably linked. ...We need to have our students become resilient problem solvers and makers: a person or thing that makes or produces something. Perhaps some of these opportunities live beyond the school day or even the school year.

R. Shaw

Finding more opportunities for our ***students to collaborate internationally*** would be a way to set us apart from other schools. We do some and should find ways to do more.

J. Lilly

What's interesting to me about leadership is that I see more ***young adults willing to lead when something matters deeply to them***—willing to work hard and put in long hours, persuade others to come along, persist in the face of setbacks, care more about the success of the enterprise than personal gain.

L. Lyle

5 Passion and the self-confidence to take risks: the capacity to be internally motivated

The real world is not broken up into subjects like it is in our school. One needs a *sense of passion and confidence in choosing one's own path*. I'm currently teaching a senior course called "Creative Nonfiction" where students choose what topics to investigate. So the kid who has a passion for sports or science or social inequalities can cover stories they care about and learn how to express his or her authentic ideas, authentic concerns, frustrations, interests, etc. in an engaging way. Many students have described it as having changed their perception of what essay writing can be. I like to think it can change their perception of what learning can be.

D. Sadicario

I think one of the keys may lie in... "doing your best". Flipping the motivation so it's intrinsic rather than extrinsic. *Getting kids to chase their own interests rather than the A* will often lead to that A anyway....The reality is that *people get better at what they practice and they practice what they like to do*. If we can encourage kids to aim for "their best" rather than seeking the unattainable perfection, we may even see some joy coming back into the classroom.

S. Hermann-Keeling

6 Grit and perseverance: the capacity to persist in the face of challenge

Grit, to me, is extremely important. The ability to stick with (or grind out) a difficult task is often under appreciated....***truly difficult problems take time and energy to resolve.*** Often times the problem solver will face seemingly endless roadblocks. Teaching students that this is common in life, and how to position one's self during these trials is extremely important.

E. Bergman

A lot of recent literature on innovation talks about “failure” in the context of “***iterations***”. The challenge with the word failure, especially in academic circles, is that we immediately think in terms of grades and ‘F’s....implementing a term like ‘iterations’ gets us closer to the true intent of the learning process.

S. Small

I don't think it is necessarily failure in and of itself that is essential to learning, but ***the process of failing and reflecting, and changing for the better...***We need to make sure that we allow time for self-reflection and feedback, so that they begin to modify what they are/have been doing. I would argue that this is the most valuable part of the process. It is a growth mindset, not one that focuses necessarily on the end product, but the process itself.

E. Coppersmith

2. How we build on MICDS strengths and continue to shape students who are exceptionally prepared for advanced study and beyond

How can we, as a community, build these skills and traits effectively?

1 Create inter-divisional student collaborations

Elicit passion, deepen understanding, and develop communication skills by engaging students as teachers and leaders, while capturing the value of positive relationships between younger and older students.

Our JK-12 school can bring us *mentoring and leadership opportunities* in ways a separate elementary and a separate secondary school cannot.

P. Laramie

How great would it be *if Upper School students were able to help Lower and Middle School students throughout the day*, too?! How worthwhile that would be for US students, and what a great way to build community between the Upper and Lower divisions.

C. Brennan

I would love to see us *interact much more inter-divisionally and in more intentional ways*.

A. O'Toole

Most of our Upper School arts classes have a range of ages, often from 9th through 12th grade. While this makes pacing a challenge, it also creates many *opportunities for older students to mentor younger ones*. I've always found that the only way to truly learn something is to teach it to someone else, and when my classes are at their best this is going on throughout the room.

P. Huber

Leadership is an experience, not a grade, and it means something different to each student. Instead of saying to students "this is leadership", we should encourage them to find out what it means to them.

I. Oulamine

2 Capitalize on “teachable moments”

Encourage faculty to use issues that arise in and out of the classroom to explore diverse perspectives, examine the validity of “facts” and place learning in a relevant context

This is slightly unfair because we do a lot of important work that builds all sorts of skills, but I think we need to do a better job of having ***students do things (projects, writing, readings, etc.) that students find relevant and important to their lives...*** For example, look at the opportunity we had with the situation in Ferguson, to use it as a teachable moment. Yet the issue went mainly unaddressed. Could we have done better with that? Can we do better with teaching kids the skill of making things relevant?

D. Sadicario

How about a project grounded in our political system to ***develop solutions that impact global issues***, such as immigration?

A. Hailand

3 Integrate “big ideas” across the curriculum

Environmental sustainability, for example, addressed on a multi-disciplinary basis, in co-curricular programming, and as an issue of community conduct affords a holistic approach to a complex subject of high contemporary relevance

Environmental studies certainly is a great multi-disciplinary topic – from civilizations that collapse from environmental degradation, from Grapes of Wrath to international efforts on climate change and more.

D. Bohigian

I definitely think that this should be something that all students at the US should study at some point in their four years! I am not sure what sort of projects are currently incorporated, but perhaps *problem-based learning in which students must come up with solutions for issues at MICDS, in the local community, and globally* could be incorporated?

S. Elliot

No matter how it is covered, I feel the most important aspect of this is *allowing the students to see the impact their contributions are making*. If we can expose them to the end result of their work in the community or globally, that could inspire them to become life-long supporters of a cause or causes.

N. Trueman

4 Tie curricular knowledge to project-based/experiential learning

Knowledge developed and applied in a real world setting that builds problem-solving and analytic skills, encourages risk-taking and potentially calls for grit, creativity and collaboration

I think **hands on learning experiences are the most valuable** from LS all the way up. When a student has the chance to touch, feel, and see something first hand I think it makes a bigger impression than text books or lectures.

M. Holecamp

When this [Investment] club meets before and after school, it is crowded with students working and collaborating. There is a big buzz around this club because the **students find it meaningful and they are interacting with the "real world"**. Sometimes, highly successful professionals come in to school, but are only really given the opportunity to speak to the students in an assembly which is a passive experience for the students, and therefore, less-than-meaningful. What other real world – "hands dirty" – experiences can we provide for our students?

D. Doherty

While there certainly are many experiential activities for our students JK-12 ... I wonder if we would benefit from **really thinking about this as a strand of the curriculum, and focus on scope and sequence just as we do in math, science, history, etc.**

E. Brunt

We are seeing a greater emphasis on field experience and real-life projects that demonstrate and further learning in colleges and universities across the country. **What used to be seen as an added value to a class is becoming central.**

E. Macias

The impact that extracurricular activities have on molding a student is often understated by the community. I feel that **the school should incorporate a way to translate the lessons learned on the field, or on the stage, into the classroom.** This way students could learn to use these lessons in more than one dimension, creating a more connected and efficient leader.

P. Brown

5 Design service learning opportunities with structure and intentionality

Structure a service experience to focus on the development of specific skills. Potentially link curricular instruction with service learning to create a project based learning experience.

I think MICDS needs to **help our young people see service as a way of using their particular, individual skills to benefit the community as a whole**. Of course, service can also provide a value-added experience for our students, and may help guide their career and life choices after they leave MICDS.

M. Clark

I think it would be great if we could **use problem-based learning as a way to deliver the curriculum**. So unlike traditional service learning, students would be presented with a real-world problem which they would have to solve by coming up with a solution and course of action. Then, perhaps they could even put that plan into place.

S. Elliot

This summer my 12 year old decided to raise money for an organization she is passionate about and amazed everyone with her results. Not only did she far surpass her own expectations... but she learned a lot in the process. She had to keep track of who sponsored her and at what levels, write emails & thank yous to supporters, research the organization and how she wanted to direct her donation, and meet with organization executives to present her gift. **So many lessons learned and skills honed in this real-world experience.**

E. Kane

6 Tap the parent/alum MICDS community and broader St. Louis as structured learning resources

Seek out resources within the diverse MICDS community to bring forth multiple experiences and perspectives and to give context to learning. In addition to using immersion and travel to gain global perspective, capitalize on the rich local community to widen horizons.

I think we have started to ***see community connections be strengthened*** in science through our partnerships with the Zoo, Danforth Plant Science Center, and our students who do research in the summer. I would love to see those types of connections be strengthened in other areas. Perhaps bringing in local artists, finding contacts with the History Museum to talk about options for kids who are interested in history, or engaging more with some of our local writers and journalists.

S. Tolch

We can ***start here in St. Louis with interactions between our students and those of other schools***. There is a world of difference between MICDS and Roosevelt High School, in South City. I'm not sure how to bridge this gap, but I do know that you don't need to travel far to begin to grasp how the reality our students know is not remotely the reality that many others live with.

K. Virant

What I'd really like to see is a ***total revamp of the Senior May Project or even a January Session*** that allows seniors...and someday maybe juniors... to work or volunteer at organizations that our alums....across the globe...not just St. Louis...can help connect our students with literally the best opportunities in each city.

B. Reisinger

By virtue of our very diverse and talented MICDS adult community, we have access to world class leaders in education, medicine, business, law, and other professions. I am confident that ***top drawer professionals who are parents and alumni would gladly spend more of their time bringing real world experience into the classrooms and club meetings*** across the school.

B. Polk

I hope we can also get some traction with the ***Global Action Project*** as students learn about social enterprise. I am excited to watch how students are thinking about dynamic ways they can be involved in their communities and even more importantly, be leaders in their communities.

L. Mittler

I work for a non profit downtown. We offer ***the ability for groups to fully immerse themselves in the neighborhood they are helping***. Groups stay in a home we own on the neighborhood. They spend the daytime doing various volunteering like working with kids and families. Part of their day is also spent on conversing about their experience and really connecting it all together. It's much better than the hit it and leave it volunteering.

D. Carpenter

Youth Leadership through Focus St. Louis provided our son with a unique opportunity to ***get out of MICDS, see the challenges facing St. Louis*** and get to know kids from all walks of life in our community. I don't know how to duplicate that for all of our students, but it was an invaluable experience that gave him greater perspective and sensitivity to the community outside – and not so far from – MICDS. It seems now more than ever working towards better understanding and empathy is critical to our children's character development and personal growth.

C. Zuccarello

Academic excellence to me is more than just good grades. Three things that I look for from a good education are: Good communication skills, strong, critical thinking skills, and the ability to take calculated risks. There seem to be people out there with strong academic credentials and advanced degrees, but without the ability or the courage to take reasonable risks. Nurturing risk taking skills seems to be a challenge for schools, but an important one.

T. Naber

Conclusion

The MICDS Jam was a first for the community – the first time that everyone affiliated with the school had the opportunity to come together to talk about setting future priorities. The Jam uncovered remarkable consensus and support for the current state of the school and an understandable but challenging request for “more.”

The Jam discussion suggests that the community has both the desire and capacity to meet this challenge by structuring curricular and co-curricular programs to create an even more integrated student experience – and in the process to define excellence in a way that generates even more profound value for all students.

Thank you!