

# STATE OF SCHOOL

**ARGO NAVIS**

**2023**



ARGO  
NAVIS  
SCHOOL

# State of School

January 12th, 2023



## Thank You

This document is a collection of selected topics discussed at the 2023 State of School hosted by Argo Navis in January 2023 in West Hollywood.

We are grateful for all the professionals who helped to make this evening possible, to include many of our amazing staff.

We wish to offer a special thanks to Kamala Avila-Salmon and Aaron Mitchell for their guidance and expertise.

And a great big thank you to all the families who made the effort to arrive at the YADA Theatre to attend this historic evening. We remain ever grateful to all our families.

### Hosted By:

- RYANNE PLAISANCE
- PAUL CONWAY
- DINA CRUZ
- LAUREN TARNE
- ACASIA VICKNAIR
- PHILLIP CANNELLA

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# Introduction

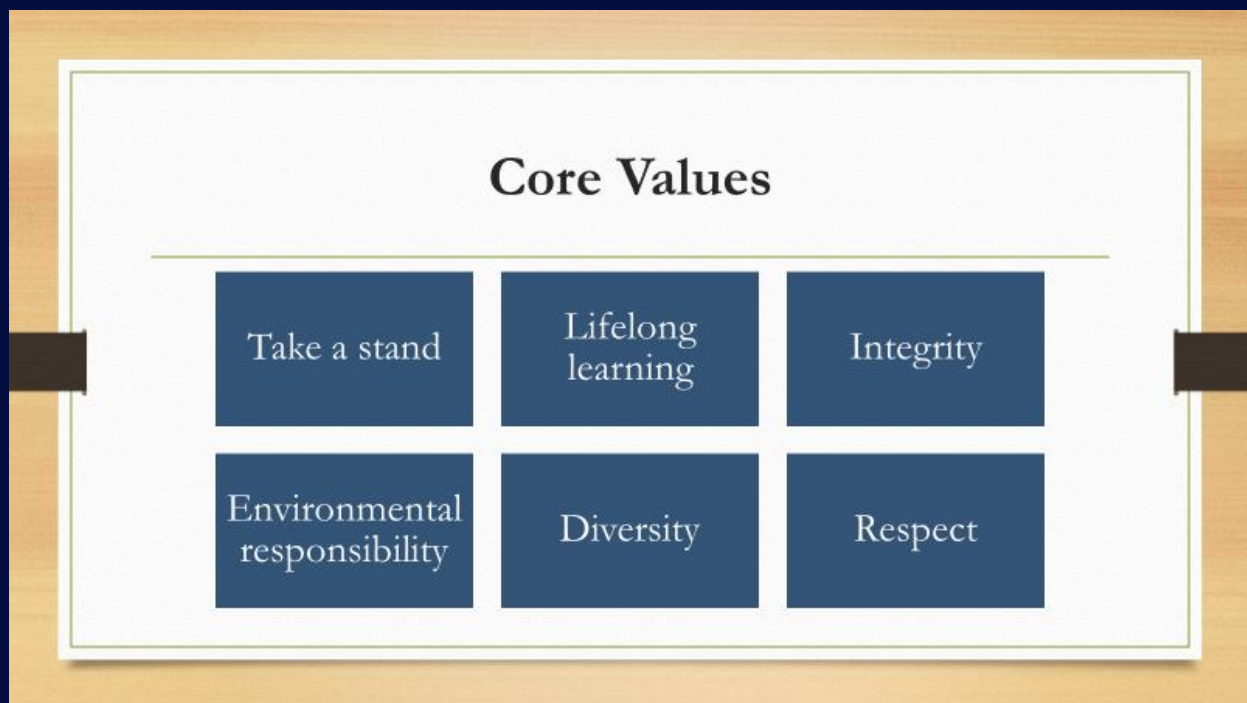
This meeting's purpose is to focus on the here and now of Argo Navis School, share our current goals, future strategic plan, and address specific questions.

Our school's core values are a road map that outlines how we engage together to carry out our vision and achieve our mission. Core values are not ambitions, and they are not self-congratulatory; they are tangible. They tell our community, "This is how we need to behave, and this is what we need to do to live out our mission and achieve our vision."

## Our Mission

Our mission: "To create a learning environment that prepares students to be future innovators, globally responsible citizens, and mindful individuals." To do this we have adopted specific core values:

## Core Values



## Take A Stand

We hold ourselves accountable for what we see and do. We stand up for injustices and show up for each other and our communities. We also take responsibility for our own actions to learn and better ourselves.

## Life-Long Learning

We are committed to offering experiences that awaken passions and seek worldly solutions through traveling and embracing the joy of the journey. This shows up in our classrooms through field trips and field studies work. We are doing something few other schools are doing by making travel a part of students' weekly lives. This is no easy feat in terms of organization, communication, safety policies and financial means. However, it is one of our core values and one we are deeply committed to as we grow. This connects with our parent community by supporting personal family travel and inviting families to join specific school travel opportunities. This connects with our teachers in our teaching methodology. We have a student-centered approach vs a teacher-centered approach. A teacher used to be viewed as a person who knew everything. We embrace the concept that teachers share, learn, and grow with their students and are excited when our students become the teachers... because, after all, they are life-long learners.

*“The teaching life is the life of the explorer and the creator, constructing the classroom for free exploration. It is about engagement. It takes courage. It is about ruthlessly exorcising what is flawed, what no longer fits, no matter how difficult it was to achieve. It is about recognizing teaching as a medium that can do some things exquisitely but cannot do everything.”*

– Christa L. Walck, “A Teaching Life,” Journal of Management Education

## Integrity

We do what is right even when it is hard, allowing our students to develop an inner moral compass to guide them in global citizenship. We are committed to:

- 1) Help students believe in themselves for who they are without needing to "be the winner"
- 2) Foster an environment of integrity- ex: getting acknowledged for doing the right thing even when it's hard, or telling the truth when they make a mistake
- 3) Ignite meaningful conversations and infuse a moral vocabulary
- 4) Model integrity and share these moments

## **Diversity**

Argo Navis School is committed to fostering an inclusive school community that values integrity, acceptance, and empathy; where all members are valued, respected, and supported. Our community is strengthened by the diverse views, beliefs, backgrounds and experiences of our students, faculty, staff, and families. Embracing diversity in all its many forms is essential to our mission. In particular, our call to provide an exemplary learning community that nurtures future leaders who will act with honor and moral courage, serve with a generous spirit, and apply critical thinking to bringing our world closer to true equity and inclusion. We instill our students with the ability to:

- Think, speak and act outside of themselves
- Demonstrate empathy and compassion
- Develop trust and friendship
- Develop deeper understanding
- Think critically
- Use a growth mindset
- Agree to disagree
- Explore things with curiosity
- Resolve conflicts
- Engage with different perspectives
- Collaborate and draw out the strengths of one another
- Truly listen
- Allow others the safe space to express themselves according to their values and beliefs

## **Environmental Responsibility**

We strive to operate in the most sustainable way possible. Our goal is to leave our environment better than when we entered. In 2015, Argo Navis School joined Green Schools National Network sharing the belief that educating for a sustainable future is no longer an option, it's a necessity. We made a decision to ally with Green Schools National Network and the Center for Green Schools to be committed to helping create a sustainable environment for our children and future generations. Our strategic plan includes efficient water usage, reducing energy demands through renewable energy sources, reducing waste, transportation efficiency, and environmental education programs and curriculum. However, the biggest impact we decided to make as a school

was to stop serving meat products and to exclusively direct our funding towards plant-based foods. We made this decision because food production is estimated to be responsible for one-quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions (reported by United Nations and NY Times). This shift was the biggest impact we, as a business, could make in reducing our carbon footprint immediately. Our goal is not for any family or child to become vegetarian or vegan, the goal is to reduce our carbon footprint as a school community! Students in both preschool and elementary and middle school receive breakfast, an afternoon snack, and home cooked meals daily for lunch. In elementary and middle school, students also have fresh veggies to snack on in each class. Our menu is globally focused and offers 2- 3 meals a week from the specific global destination country we explore. Unlike most school lunch programs, students are able to have 2nds and even 3rds during lunch time. In addition to the hot lunches served in elementary and middle school, students are able to choose any items from our choice bar.

## **Respect**

We embrace inclusivity and appreciate differences with curiosity and kindness. We acknowledge people can have differing opinions, traditions, and ways of life that differ from ours and be open to understanding different perspectives. We enter difficult conversations with a listening ear and the desire to understand. Maintaining respect is key in all conversations between individuals.

## **Community**

Many of you cited our community as being one of the most important aspects of what you love about Argo Navis. In truth, our community is the backbone of our work. We are a community of innovators who support all families and every child. We are a community that has come together for one sole purpose which binds us all- to provide our kids with an education where they are seen and heard. An education that allows them to find their passions, become innate problem solvers, and reach their full potential. An education where being a global citizen isn't an aspiration, it's the way they live their lives. We are all here because we believe the education of our children is one of the most important gifts we can give them.

# Development & Planning

## Funding

*Where did the funding come from for Argo Navis?*

Most if not all public schools receive government funding and most private schools have an investor - we don't use either. Argo Navis School was entirely funded by the Conway's.

The Conway family was able to fund Argo Navis after 10 years of strategic financial planning and a thoughtful business model.

### *Message from the Founders (Conway's)*

*People have asked who oversees us, who governs us, where is the bureaucracy and oversight? For 20 years, I (Ryanne) worked in a system of bureaucracy. I was a passionate teacher who became exhausted fighting for my students' basic needs, so I tried to make changes in our system as an administrator. That change was slow, and everyone seemed to have a different priority and the focus was rarely on the students. Then I worked in policy, thinking I could really change things systemically on a higher level. I did community organizing and fought for bills to be passed traveling to our state senate in Sacramento where I soon realized the work I was doing might see some light in the far future. The bureaucracy was... heavy. I realized I was still in the wrong place. We have the research. We know the changes that need to be made in education, but the change is too slow for our kids today. I wanted change for my students and for my daughters today.*

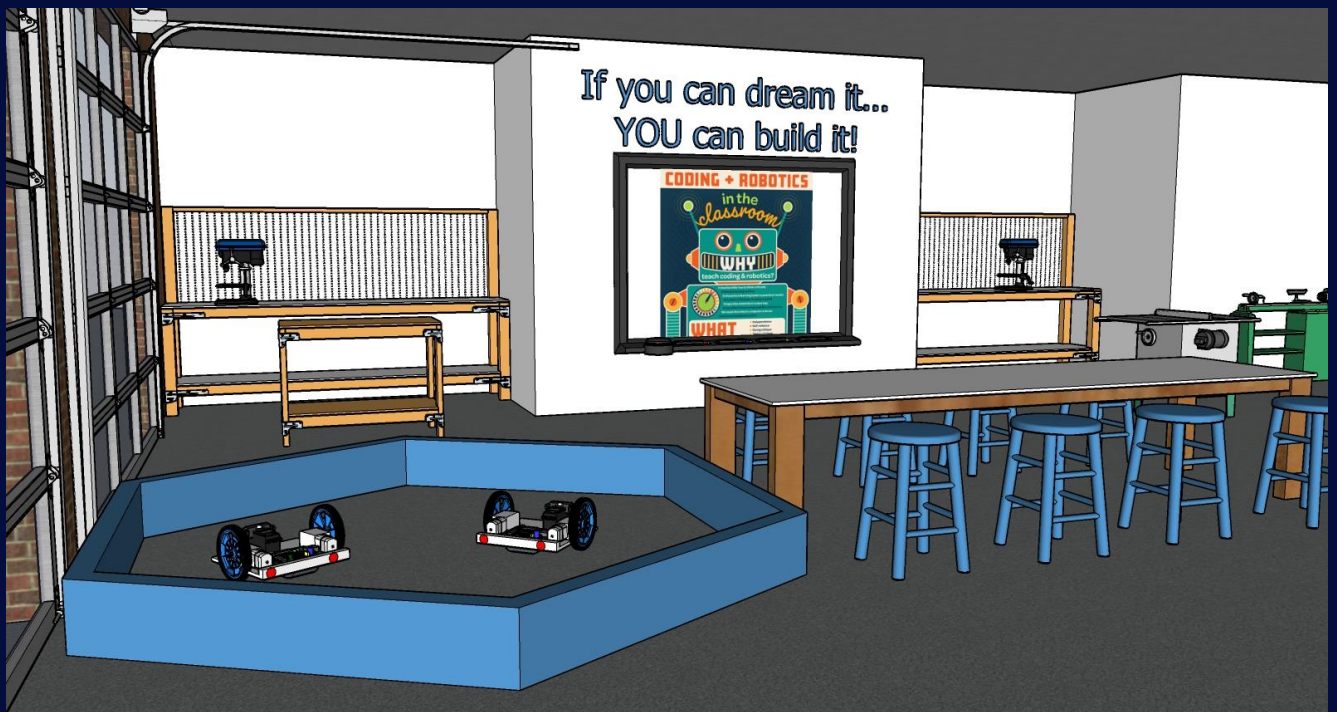
*Argo Navis does not operate like a traditional school. We never have and we never will. We are operating one of the most robust programmatic school models in the nation and we are doing it at a fraction of the cost compared to most private schools anywhere. We are able to do this because all our funding is focused on our students, teachers, and school operations.*

## Playa Campus Development

What are the plans for the development of our Playa campus? I want to start by sharing with everyone what the design plans are and then what our development plan and process is. These plans are possible because of Shana Cunningham, who is an incredible interior designer and so much more.



## Makers Space





# Financial Literacy Room



FINANCIAL LITERACY ROOM - ELEVATION A



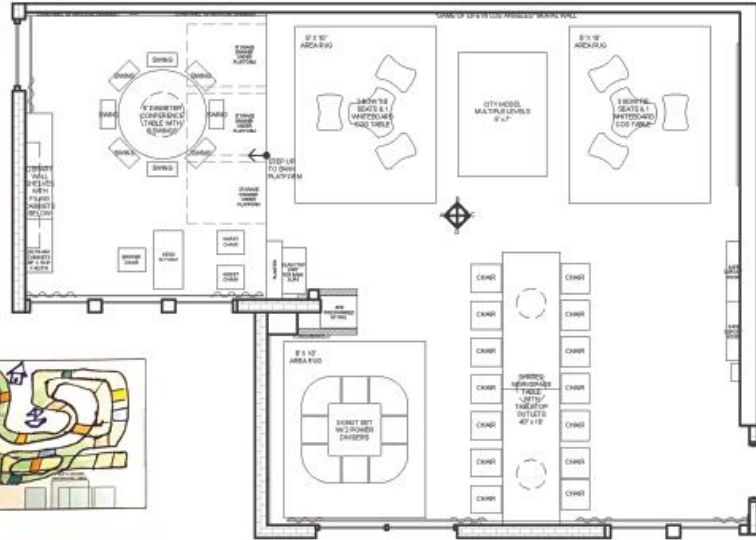
FINANCIAL LITERACY ROOM - ELEVATION C



FINANCIAL LITERACY ROOM - ELEVATION B



FINANCIAL LITERACY ROOM - ELEVATION D



SHANA CUNNINGHAM  
DESIGNS



# Art & Design Room



# Music Production Studio



MUSIC ROOM 213 - ELEVATION A

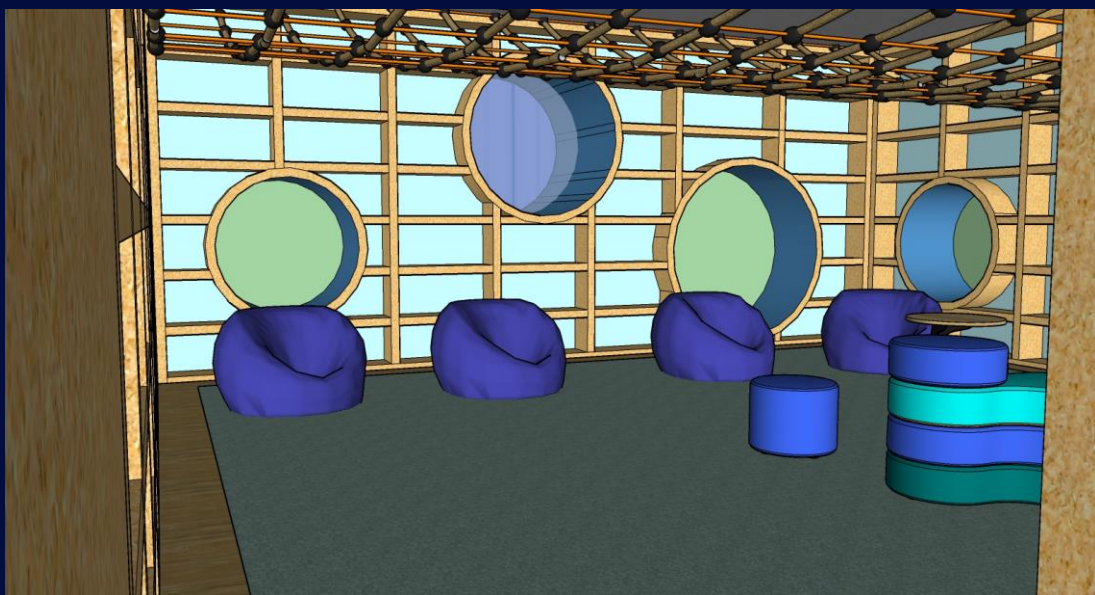
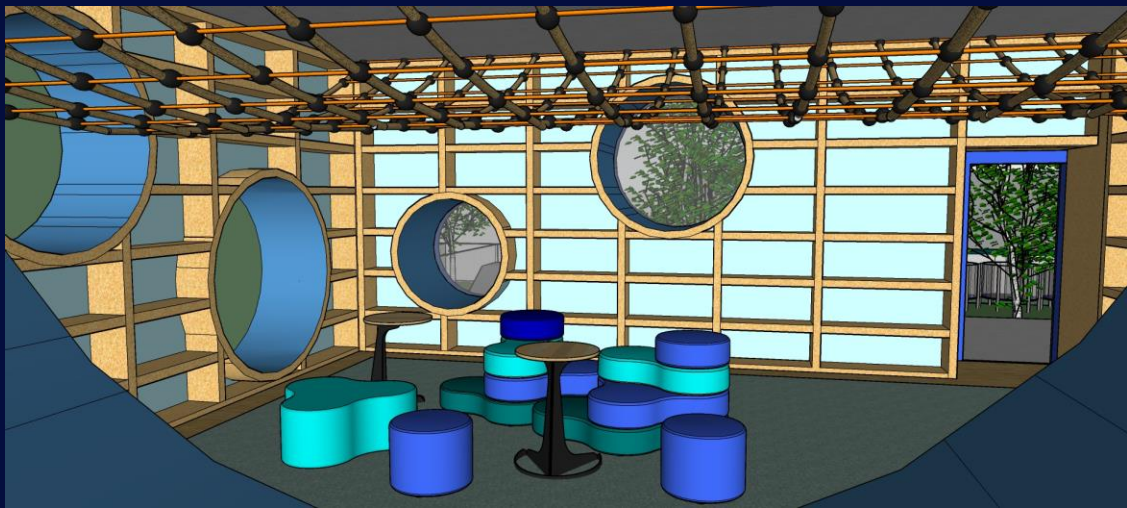


MUSIC ROOM 213 - ELEVATION B

# Culinary Arts Kitchen



# Library



## Exterior Front



Below is an outline description of projects completed upon opening as well as projects on deck and future projects to be completed:

### Opening (Completed)

- **Safety.** Fire alarm inspections, security (hired a security company and installed cameras, new locks, alarms). Built a fence on the southwest side to offer protection from intruders and also to provide a home for Pigsley and our growing agriculture program.



- **Building.** Paint job, professional cleaners to deep clean property and remove vandalism, gum, etc. Smaller fixes such as creating the keys for any paper towels and toilet paper and soap dispensers. New locks to secure entrances/exits.
- **Internet.** Required permitting- installment process lasted three months while we were forced to use hot spots. Teachers were reimbursed if they chose to use their own hot spots.
- **Classrooms.** Deep cleaned, installed new floors, assembled furniture (thanks to volunteers' help!), classroom libraries, etc.
- **Makers.** Special floors for construction, new equipment and materials.
- **Financial Literacy.** Designed to specifications.

The above work was completed within the first three months.

The onsite projects which we are currently working on (that don't need permitting and a construction crew) include:

- Art/Design
- Music Production Studio
- Outside reading and hang out spots
- Slide
- Aerial Rig
- Track and rubber flooring

Three Phase plans for areas that need city permitting and structural changes:

## Phase 1 / Planning

Working with architects to analyze and design.

- Interview contracting companies for scope of work
- Determine costs of each area
- Determine timeline and prioritize areas
- Finalize plans with property owner

## Phase 2 / Funding

- Organize a capital campaign committee
- Create a feasibility study
- Case for support
- Screen prospects
  - Include working with partnering organizations
  - Finalize deadlines and goals

## Phase 3 / Building and Construction

- Confirm construction timeline with GC and company
- Organize student scheduling and safety
- Begin construction

We are currently in Planning Phase 1. We need to have this phase completed before we can determine a timeline for Phases 2 & 3. This is a huge undertaking, and we are still a small school. The timeline for this will depend on our enrollment numbers for this fall and the growth of our community. We are excited that while being on this campus for only six months, we have been able to accomplish so much, and we are excited about the future projects.

*Do most private schools base their budget on enrollment?*

Yes, most schools' operating budgets are based on enrollment. Between 70-80% of a school's funding is based on tuition. The next 20-30% comes from major gifts from parents and a small percentage from grants. We are strategically planning to engage various additional revenue sources outside of these domains. Birthday parties are one such source and presently in operation. All party revenue goes directly to the school to support tuition assistance which allows us to support school operations. We are also developing community partnerships to add revenue. Our goal is that Argo Navis becomes a community hub. How many school spaces are just sitting there on weekends and after school? We are doing things differently to support the communities we are in while creating additional revenue streams. We are currently working with Skateside, FocusFish, Focus Health CPR, YADA, and Show Off Dance Company to create classes for the community while renting out our space when not in use. Aside from bringing in additional revenue, this venture also creates a community space of healthy activities for kids and teens. We are working with community partners to bring these activities to families in need. We are already engaged with neighborhood youth services and holding

financial literacy classes for predominantly Hispanic families from low-income households for kids and adults free of charge. Our goal is to create diversified income streams while also giving back to the community. As a private school, we have a great responsibility to make our communities stronger for everyone.

## Financial State of the School

My name is Paul Conway, for those of you who only know me by email. I am a co-owner and co-founder and managing member of Argo Navis School, and my role is the Director of Strategic Operations and Chief Financial Officer over the past seven years.

I would like to spend some time sharing with you the financial status of the school, share some high-level insight into how we manage and coordinate budgets and financial planning, and to answer some of the questions parents have asked about our overall financial business model and practices.

### History

First, a little background on me and a brief background on how our business was formed. Before Argo, I worked for 15 years for numerous companies first as an Application Developer, then as a Senior Data Analyst, and then as a Senior Business Analyst for Fortune 500 companies such as BCBG Max Azria, Toyota, Disney, CBS Television, and the Capital Group. I worked for a variety of departments creating planning and strategy solutions as well as developing and implementing streamline task applications for human resources teams, finance and accounting teams, distribution centers, retail storefronts, and senior management teams. My primary skillset was as a professional Microsoft Excel VBA Developer, which means in essence I created complicated automated spreadsheet tools and models and employed those tools to guide senior management and executives in financial forecasting, business strategy, trending models, and strategic business forecast and planning.

When the preschool was launched in October 2015, I used all my knowledge and experience in working with large, successful corporations to implement useful business strategies and planning to set our own course, albeit on a much smaller scale. Yet the principles and strategies in play were very much the same, and with greater stakes for me personally—namely my own children. From our very modest inception, we have seen positive growth in each consecutive year (with the exception of 2020) and have reaped the benefits of practicing firm financial discipline, extensive forecasting and cash flow projection models updated and scrutinized on a daily basis, and a resolve to meet all challenges as they came.

We are a private company, and we are privately owned and operated, which is not the norm for almost all schools. We have chosen this route by design to offer us a strategic advantage both as an effective business model and to effectively bypass the typical bureaucratic dysfunction under which most schools struggle to make even the most basic necessary changes. In truth, the education industry is one of the few industries in the nation which has not adapted significantly over time, and with new research, and new methodologies available across decades of growth.

Beyond some technology and tool upgrades, virtually all schools operate and function in the same methodology and systematic categorical teaching methods focusing almost entirely on linguistic (language) and logical (math) learning across the decades of a developing world. The teaching model that was first adapted for a newly industrialized world in the early 1900s is no longer applicable; and yet most schools continue in lockstep devotion to this model long after its practical usefulness had been discarded. The schools of today are virtually identical to the schools which I attended in the 1970s, and perhaps identical to my father's school and his father's before him. And this is why we needed to break free from the outdated model, and by doing so, we are also breaking long outdated traditional norms in numerous other ways, to include how this school operates. *And* by doing so, we have set ourselves free to become a school unlike any other in the country to date. Yet we are new, and as any entrepreneur can attest: nothing worthwhile happens overnight. Or without some struggle.

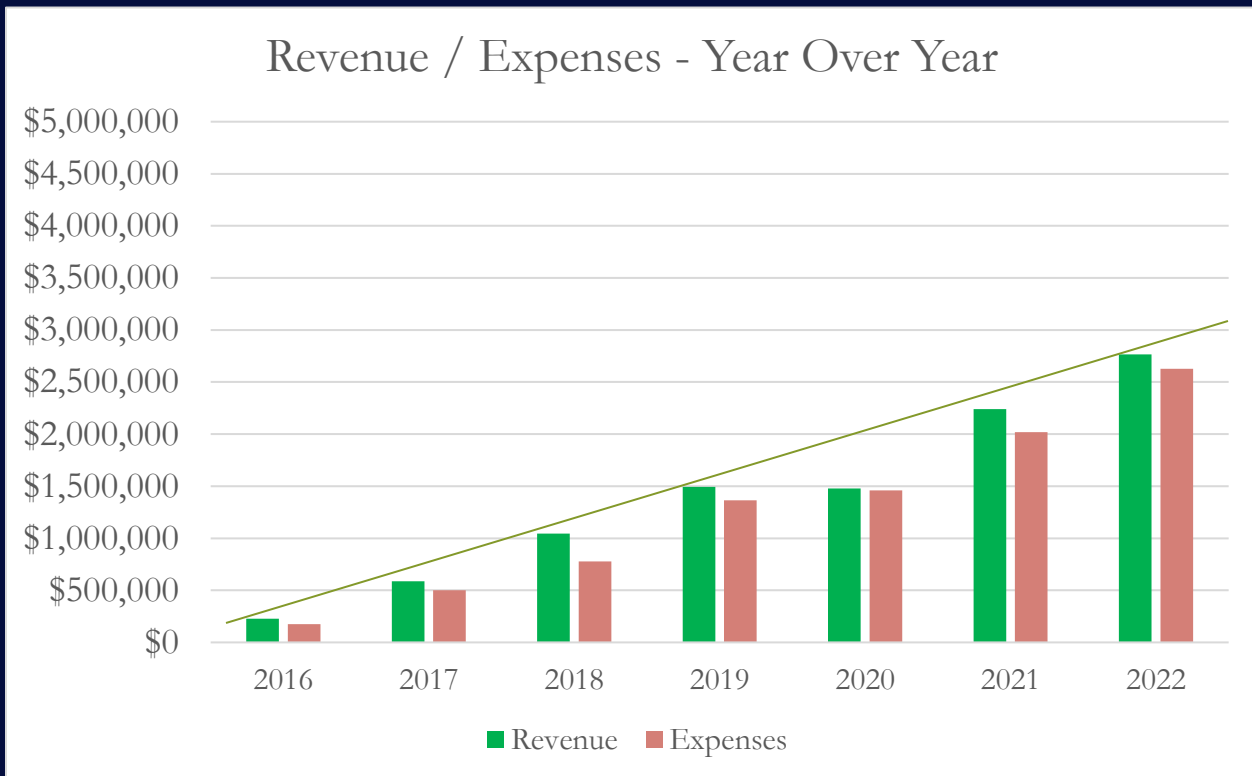
When Ryanne and I launched this new school, Ryanne was already working securely as a leader in Education and I was a Senior Business Analyst for a large financial institution in downtown LA— we both had secure day jobs, a beautiful house, a secure life. I never had this before, certainly not in my childhood. Once the decision had been made to launch this new school, we moved into a small apartment to save— for years. Neither Ryanne or I come from families of wealth, we are not trust fund children. We come from hard-working families where we learned the merit of hard work.



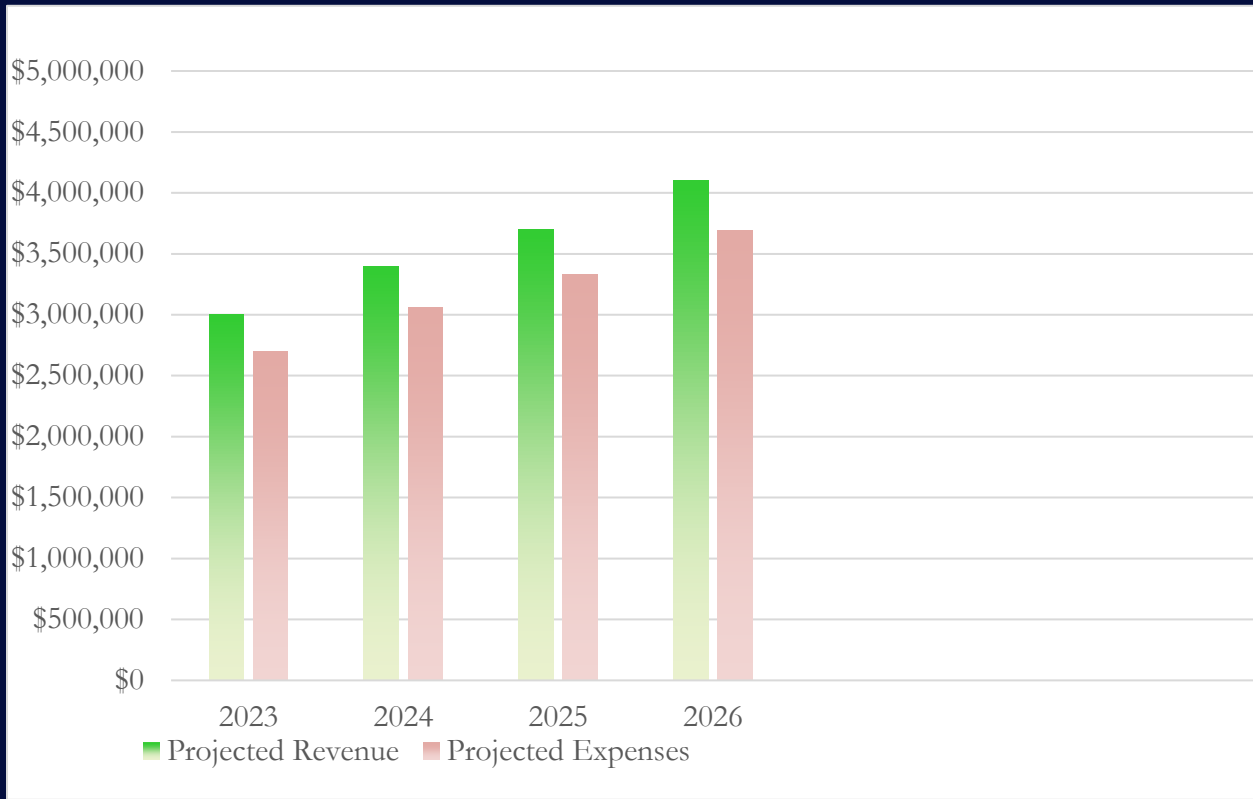
In the seven years since we began, the facility at Playa Vista is the sixth facility we have opened; and though it may be the largest so far it is certainly not the most difficult.

## Growth

Unlike most start-up companies, our school has seen consistent growth year-over-year (apart from 2020 and the pandemic) maintaining an average growth rate of 29% annually and a median Net Margin of 10% annually. This is impressive and hopeful in consideration that elementary and middle school tuition at Argo remains considerably lower than its regional competitors and operates across a 12-month school year versus other schools which provide schooling for nine months. We also include a full day schedule from 8am - 6pm each school day all included in the price of tuition, along with 1 meal and two snacks prepared onsite; while most other schools end at around 2:30pm each day and offer working parents the option for after school care and catered meals at an additional cost. The innovative and revolutionary programming at Argo is a jewel in our modern-day model.

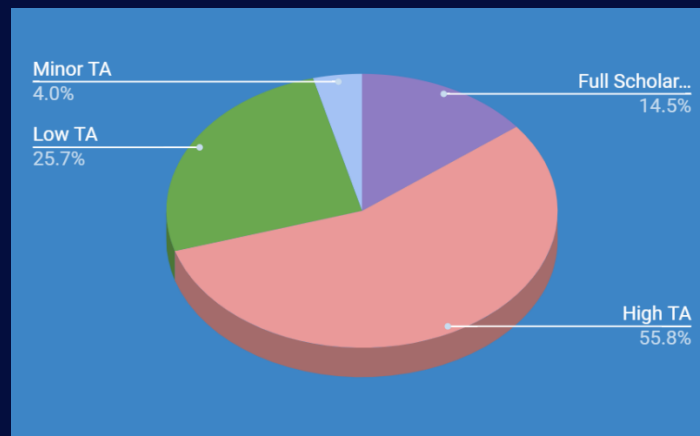


Net Margin	23%	15%	27%	9%	1%	10%	5%
Growth		159%	78%	43%	(1)%	52%	23%



## Tuition Assistance

Diversity is a core tenet of our school mission and we therefore invest our own funding and resources to our internal Tuition Assistance program. Each year, dozens of families are beneficiaries of tuition assistance to ensure that a quality education program is not only available to families who can afford it. Each year, we donate an average of \$250,000 of tuition to families in financial need. During the pandemic we donated over \$320,000. This funding is in-house, not a government subsidy, and a priority at our school. We use an equitable platform called FAST to allocate funding for a full range of financial need, not exclusively to families in greatest need.



## Staff

Small class sizes and student-to-teacher ratios are critical in managing individualized learning, which is also a core tenet, and is also one of the largest expenses of the school as headcount is increased to maintain small class sizes. We invest greatly in our staff, and we aspire to become one of the most competitive schools in Los Angeles regarding staff satisfaction. We offer a full medical insurance package and we pay 90% of the premium for both PPO and HMO policies. We offer full dental and vision plans and pay 100% of the PPO policy.

All our staff are invited to eat lunch at our school free of charge every day, and we make sure snacks and drinks are always readily available for staff members. We presently offer all our full time staff eight weeks of paid break and holiday periods. We offer five personal days each year in addition to break periods, and we place no cap on the usage of accrued sick days each year. We innovated an internal peer review system called CKLAP in which staff members acknowledge the great work performed by their peers and accrue points to receive badges in five separate leadership categories. Badges earned over time determine a staff member's eligibility for pay raises and advancement within the company, and there is no limit to potential growth for any staff member.

We meet with staff twice a year for Semi Annual Reviews to outline the accomplishments, strengths, objectives, areas of growth, and a plan for advancement. Semi Annual Reviews are also the time in which we work with staff members to select both professional and personal milestones, which when achieved, translate into CKLAP points and continued advancement. All staff members are on a continuous path of personal and professional development and we financially support nearly all endeavors. We place a high priority on staff members selecting "personal" milestones— goals that have nothing whatsoever to do with the school but have great personal meaning to the staff member: learning to sail, taking a cruise, traveling to Europe, saving for a house, attending school, learning a new language— anything that is personally important to each individual. We then work to set up achievable goals in pursuit of that milestone, and we make it a requirement for advancement to add leverage. Helping each staff member achieve something that is deeply personally important has become a powerful connection we share with our staff as it confirms we are as invested in them as they are to the school. And we are always available to help anyone struggling to meet their goals.

We also reward and celebrate our staff on each annual anniversary with cash bonuses and other gifts that increase incrementally each year in our Tenure Award Program. We offer a retirement program for all full time staff through CalSavers and we aim to provide a matching funds program in the near future.

Our preschool teachers earn in the top 10% of preschool teacher salaries in Los Angeles, and our elementary and middle school teachers earn in the slightly above the average range at around the 50% mark for private elementary and middle school teachers. As our school continues to grow, a primary goal for us is for all our staff to be top earners

among private schools in Los Angeles.

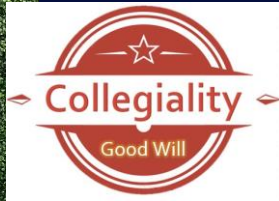
Argo Navis Elementary and Middle School is less than five years old and is still considered a Start Up at this age. We are proud of the advancements we have made for our staff and to be meeting the median of salaries and beyond– and excited to go much further. Four years ago, our teachers did not have any benefits. We had no Personal Days. No Tenure Awards. We are continuously doing more and more for our staff and are excited with each new level to which we rise with our staff.

Our teachers work an 8-hour workday. They have break periods and Admin Hours totaling ten hours a week on average. We do this to support our teachers not bringing work home as is the case in most traditional schools.

All teachers are eligible to receive overtime pay. This includes any teacher who has opted to drive the school vans for our busing system. When we made the move to Playa it was a benefit for some of our teachers to drive our vans. The teachers get paid time and a half, they also get paid for ½ of their commutes that they would have otherwise made, and they don't spend as much on gas and mileage for their own vehicles. From the school's perspective, having our trusted teachers who already operate our vehicles weekly and know our children intimately, driving the vans for school bussing is a blessing.

We use a modern Purchase Ordering system called Divvy, which allows each staff member to have their own personal company credit card to make any authorized purchase on behalf of the school. All school supplies and materials needed by teachers are made via this easily accessible and instant access tool which allows for immediate purchases which can be uploaded into the accounting and bookkeeping software we use for seamless tracking. Teachers do not spend their own money on school materials, unlike most other traditional schools.





**Commitment**

**Innovation**

**Community**

**Development**

**Collegiality**

Showing high level of commitment to City Kids, to our students, or to one's peers. Going above and beyond the standards, showing exceptional levels of devotion to the mission, purpose, values and principles of the school.

Creating and implementing innovative concepts or ideas which either assist the school, staff, or students in any way. The expressed use of creative methods to directly or indirectly advance the purpose or mission of City Kids.

Acts which build upon the strength of community with parents of the students at City Kids. Promoting or enhancing relationships with parents to feel more connected to each other and to the core values of the school.

Setting forth and achieving personal and professional goals which build upon an individual's capabilities toward a standard of excellence. Consistency in establishing core goals for self-improvement. Achieving goals and milestones that propel an individual toward self-mastery.

Any act of good-will and comradery with other staff members to increase harmony within the City Kids team of professionals. Promoting productivity and teamwork in a compassionate, selfless, and giving manner. Establishing a working environment of cooperation and kindness.

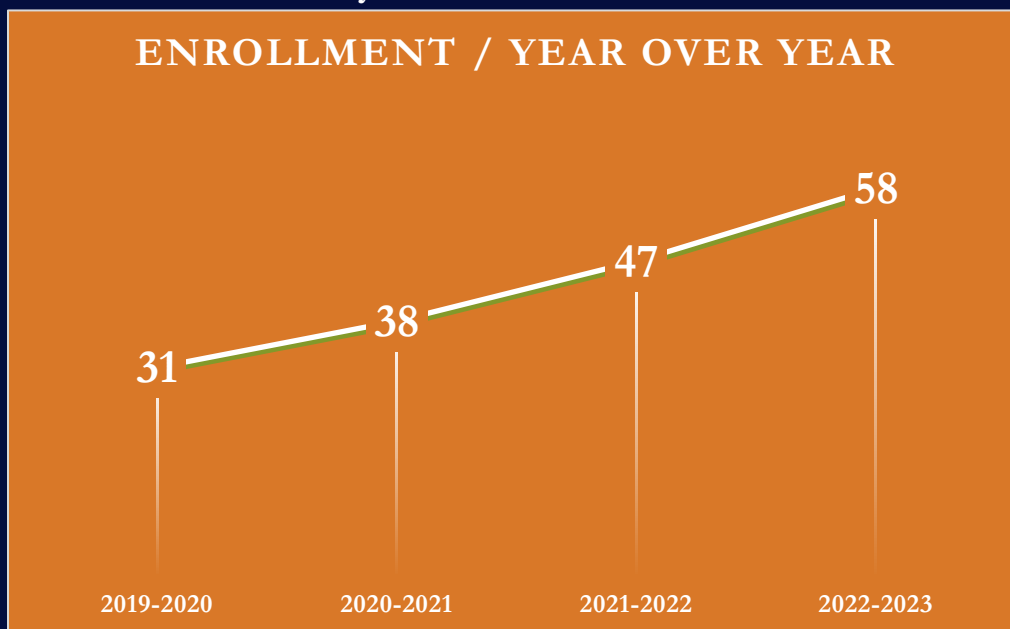
## Teacher Diversity

We are proud to acknowledge that 64% of our staff are ethnically diverse, and yet we are continuing to expand and broaden our diversity among new headcount to more fully represent not only our values but to have a representation of leaders in the school who more fully reflect a positive model of influence on our diverse population of students. We are also aware that over 80% of our total staff identify as female, and we continue to seek and encourage qualified male-identified and non-binary applicants to join our growing team. Ryanne is presently working with different leaders in the community to help us accomplish these goals.

## Enrollment

Over 90% of our revenue stream is from tuition. As of today, our school is in the strongest financial position it has ever been; and on average our elementary and middle school enrollment grows consistently by 23% annually. This accounts for an 8% exit rate annually. We have a conservative plan for our Playa campus growth which includes a 21 student increase for next school year. We have invested in advertising and marketing strategies, community outreach and partnerships, you, our families' word of mouth, and visual signage and advertising on our school buildings. For the first time, we have an Admissions Manager, Lauren Tarne, who launched our Admissions Department and is establishing community partnerships and creating avenues of awareness within the surrounding community to bolster enrollment numbers. This is an exciting year for us as we build and grow our new campus.

### Elementary & Middle School Enrollment



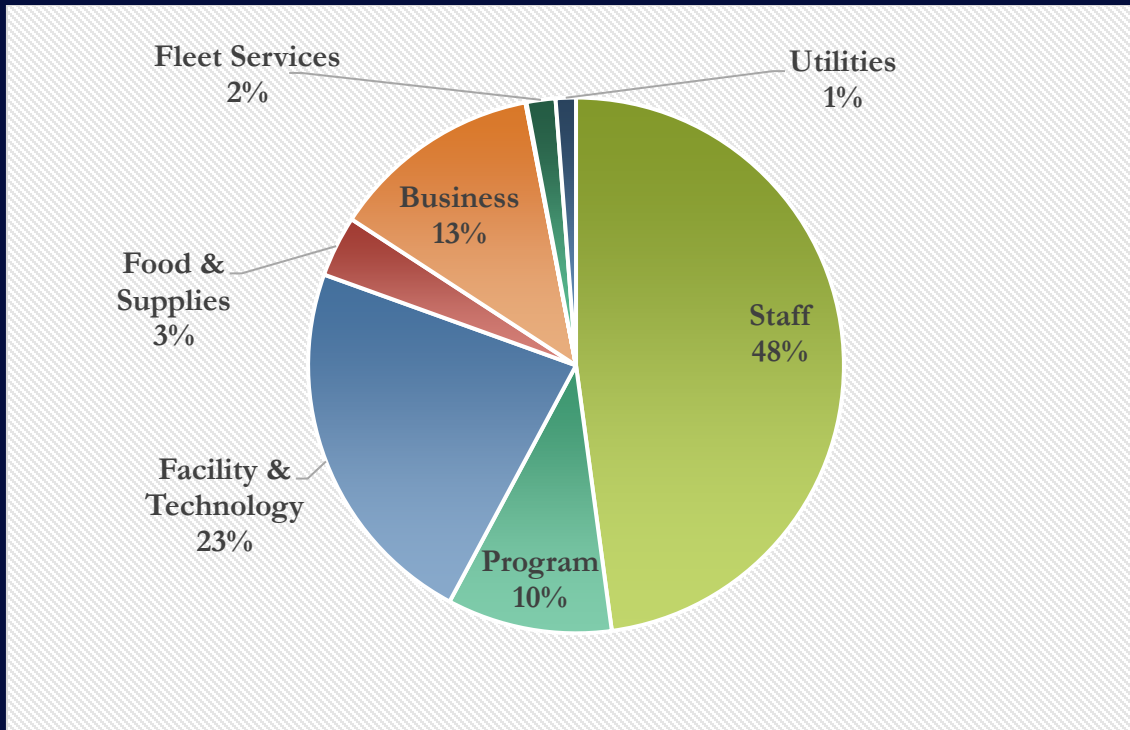
23% Annual Growth rate

8% Exit rate

21 New Students

## Operations

Finally, I want to share with you our total percentages in a high-level view of operations costs. The majority of our operating expenses are committed to Staff expenses as you can see, which includes: payroll, benefits, bonuses, payroll tax, unemployment, workers comp, staff training, team building, and all other staff-related expenses. We also invest heavily into our many Programs allocating 10% of our annual budget. We will continue to reinvest profits, as we have done every year, for the continuing expansion of our facility until we achieve all our objectives.



I want to reassure you that while we may not be able to predict every adversity, we will always rise to meet any challenge. We are experts in our fields. This also means that we recognize we are not experts at *everything*, and that as leaders of the school we seek out those who are experts in whatever service we require, from administrative staff to teachers to contractors.

We have set aside and spent a considerable amount of our capital reserve to create the development of the Playa Vista facility to date and have hit nearly every objective to date. We are on track to continue our development, however, our plan for continued development requires some time. We take great pride in acknowledging that everything that we have said we would accomplish at 5517, we have done. Our development of the facility at 5521 has been completed as we said it would. And the same will be done here. We ask for your patience, for your continued passion and support for what is to come.

# Programs & Structure

## Curriculum

All Argo Navis curricula are aligned with the following educational standards:

- Common Core (including TK)
- International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)
- Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)
- World Language California Standards
- California Computer Science Standards

We are curriculum mapped to high school using the state standards as our guide. For example, we know what every 4th grade student in CA is learning. Our classes are designed around these standards. Our teachers, however, have the flexibility to create projects around these standards which allows for inspired ideas from students and teachers. We are a true project-based learning program.

### Individualized Learning Plan

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

**Spanish**

- Compute multi-digit math problems from dictation and explain her thought process in Spanish
- Begin to write complete sentences with proper grammar and sentence structure.
- Understand verb conjugations and actively incorporate conjugations into speaking and writing in an effort to work towards fluency.
- Construct complete sentences in conversation and use proper/improper nouns and verbs when addressing individuals

**English**

- Use upper and lower case letters, punctuation, and spaces between words correctly when writing.
- Write an opinion piece with three reasons for her answer, incorporating linking words such as "first, also, in conclusion."
- Read and use accurately in writing diphthongs such as aw/au, oy/oi, and ow/ou.
- Identify and use appropriately declarative, interrogative and exclamatory sentences in her stories and scripts.
- Add adjectives and other descriptive details to her narrative writing.
- Read an ever-widening range of books, summarizing and answering questions about them.

Each student starting at age 3 ½ in preschool and continuing through elementary and middle school are given an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP). This plan includes the academic/cognitive, social-emotional, physical development, and specialized goals for each student for the current school year. It's a clear plan for both families, students, and teachers to follow. This plan is updated throughout the school year as students meet or exceed goals or if students need additional support in specific areas. Families meet three times a year to discuss the progress of this plan and in middle and elementary to discuss student's progress reports which follow each student's ILP.

	Spanish Language:	Exploring	Developing	Integrating		Spanish Phonological Awareness (A-Z):	Exploring	Developing	Integrating
1	Communicate well using sentences with subject pronouns, verbs & complement				4	Known different kinds of verbs in a sentences			
2	Introduce herself in conversations using subject pronouns (I'am, you are, he/she is, we are & they are)				5	Identify syllables in spanish words			
3	Conjugate regular verbs (amar, correr, partir)				6	Identify, read & write verbs in sentences			

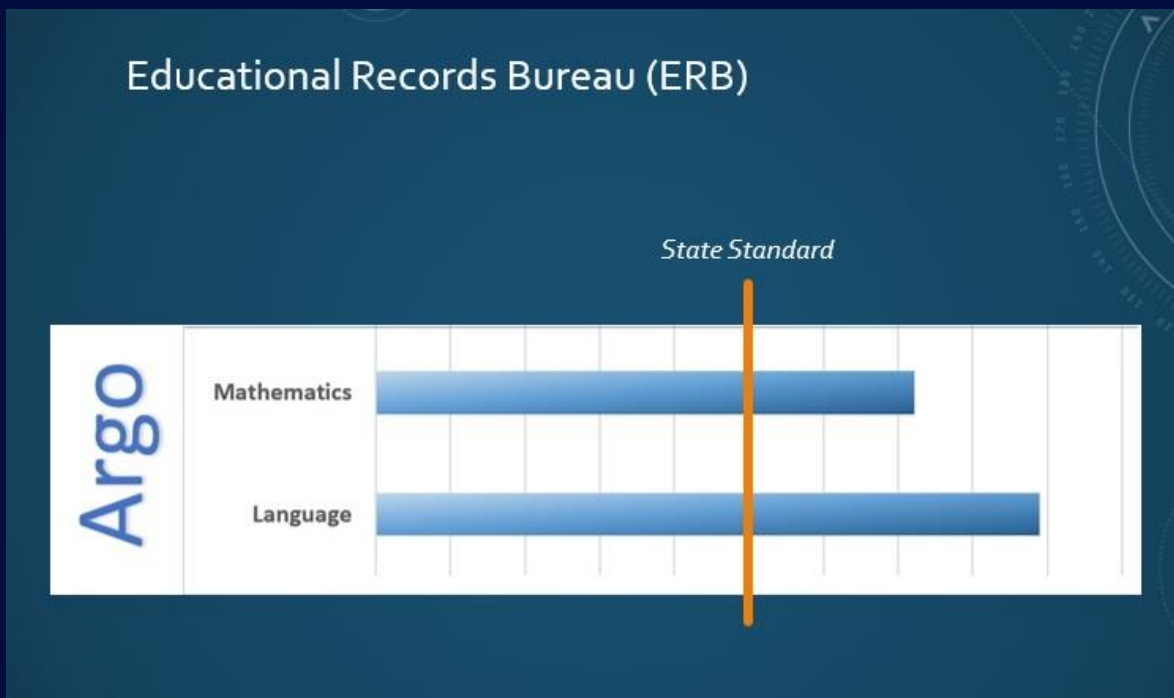
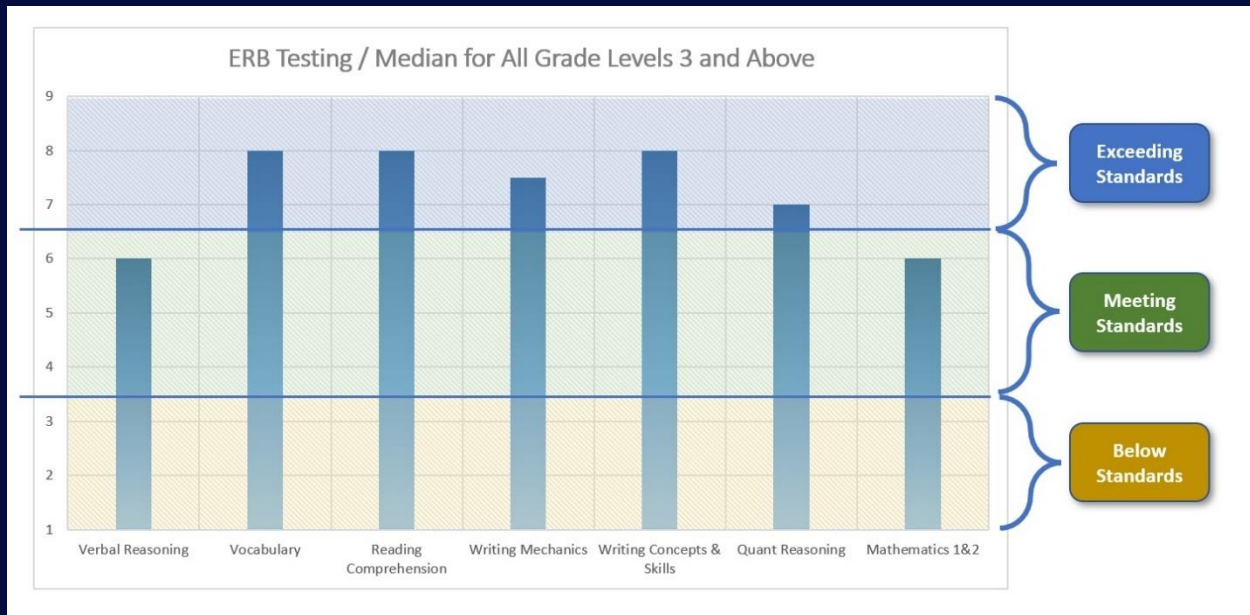
Internally, our teachers use a very specific tracking system which can only happen in our small class sizes. The tracking system breaks down the trimesters goals for your student which teachers use to plan lessons and projects. Each week, teachers make notes on the progress of each student related to the goals and standards they are working on.

In elementary and middle school, we use a system of mastery instead of grades to show student advancements. When a teacher feels a student is reaching a new level in an academic area, the teacher will assess the student to confirm. That assessment may include a quiz, a test, a presentation, writing assignments, etc. In preschool, we also use the The BRIGANCE Early Childhood Screening tool. We also participate in an annual ERB testing for students in grades 2 and up.

The ERB (Educational Records Bureau) is a standardized test administered to measure the skills learned by their students in that grade level. Many schools start this testing in 3rd grade. We used to start in 1st grade but we now start in 2nd grade. The younger elementary years for ERB testing are very much focused on helping our students understand *how* to take a state test. For students in 2nd, 3rd, and even 4th grade these tests are long and take a great deal of focus. It is often when we see a student complete their answers before the question has been asked. We see students begin strong and then tire and quickly fill in the rest of their answers so they can be done.

So why do we take these tests with our young students? We do this purely as a test prep. Testing requires specific test taking skills and strategies. When our kids start testing at a young age, they are more familiar with these skills- specifically these kinds of tests. From

an individual student perspective, we use these tests simply as a snapshot in time of a student's performance. Test-taking skills, nerves, focus, and general unfamiliarity with standardized tests (particularly in the younger years) can all affect scores. ERB results are always best considered in partnership with the student's daily work and performance in the classroom. From a school-wide perspective, the ERBs provide an overall picture of student learning and can highlight trends in achievement. These results guide discussions regarding the areas where the school should focus instruction and areas where the school is excelling. From a school-wide perspective, I want to share our students ERB scores from this year:



We did exceptionally well with our ERB testing this past year, but I am hesitant to put emphasis on this. We strategically are not a school that teaches to the test.

What does ‘not a school that teaches to the test’ mean? In general, ‘teaching to the test’ means that teachers are matching what they teach to what they expect to see on the state tests. In this way, students are likely to memorize facts and utilize rote memorization than conceptual understanding and problem-solving. They will, for example, be able to answer a question when it is written such as “ $87-12 = \underline{\quad}$ ” (as they have been prepped for) but can’t answer the question when it’s presented in a different format such as “subtract 12 from 87”. This process robs students from mastering a concept or subject matter and instead focuses on memorizing as much information that correlates to the test as possible. Some studies suggest that in 6-month time frame students will forget over 80% of the information memorized for the test. What we do know is that when students are involved in deeply engaging subject work, applying knowledge to multiple aspects of a project, that’s when deeper learning happens. Understanding the precision of measurement and fractions when building a candy dispenser, for example, and seeing how math applies to tangible objectives allows for students to understand math in a conceptual way that is far greater than rote memorization.

I know this research to my core, and yet I too grew up in a world where the pressure to ace a test defined my potential. I was in all the AP and Honors classes watching out the window as the “troubled kids” were building something exciting in shop class. My friends and I would compare grades and we knew who had the best chance at an Ivy League college and who would have to settle for something less.

Luckily, our world is changing. The pandemic helped to accelerate the change in how we assess our students. Forbes released a study from the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (Fair Test) this past November that stated that *more than 80% Of Four-Year Colleges Won’t Require Standardized Tests For Fall 2023 Admissions*. We as a nation are beginning to see our students as people with gifts and talents that can’t be summed up neatly by any one test.

Our goal at Argo is to provide the highest academic environment for all our students to master subjects. We strive to do this while simultaneously building your child’s love for learning. We care most that your child becomes an innate problem solver, and that if they don’t know something they will find the answer and won’t give up until they do. Your child’s self-worth will not be determined by a letter grade on a test but on their actions, perseverance, and compassion for others. About  $\frac{1}{2}$  of our 4th grade class is graduating a year early this summer. Next year, there may not be any student to graduate early. Our goal is only to support your child to reach their potential and discover their passions.

## Field Trips/Studies and Extracurriculars

Our class schedule (both daily and yearly) was developed to accommodate **experiential** learning. Our day is longer and our class times are longer. A traditional school day is from 8:00 am to 2:30 pm (6 ½ hrs instruction). Our school days are from 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM (school remains open until 6 pm- 8 ½ hours of instruction). Most schools' class time is 45 minutes. Our class time is 90 minutes (with a 15 min break in each class) to total 75 minutes of instruction time. We follow the research and don't assign homework in elementary or middle school- with the exception that your child must read 15 minutes a day. Students also have classes that support the same learning objectives. For example, they have a primary math class in English and may also have a Spanish math class, or a design and engineering class that are covering the same math concepts. Many language immersion schools only have classes in one language. If you're at a French immersion school, all the classes are spoken in French, for example. Due to our schedule, students have literacy classes in both Spanish and English. This provides them with the same instructional time in their second language as a traditional immersion language school while also allowing for them to study subjects in their first language.

Our weekly schedule accommodates both field trips and field studies. Field trips start in preschool and continue throughout elementary and middle school. Field trips may be an experience such as a pop-up art exhibit or a trip connected to a topic of which the students are learning at the time, such as a visit to the LA Times for a photojournalism class (not all field trips are connected to class coursework). We value that the experience of traveling to new places and locations provides social-emotional benefits and introduces students to new ideas and perspectives.

Field studies are longer programs with curriculum associated with the destination. Field studies begin in elementary school and may include Waterfront education classes, sailing, Youth Academy of Performing Arts, scuba diving, special design classes, fine art etc. Field trips and studies are included in tuition and are budgeted at the beginning of the school year. Programs also include: all Physical Education programs (Aerial, Dance, and Swimming for preschool) Aerial, Dance, Skateboarding, Sports Programming (soccer, football, tennis, volleyball, basketball, swimming, etc.) This past trimester, we offered Rock Climbing/Bouldering at Sender One. We also offer extracurriculars for families who have asked us to offer additional activities that are not budgeted. At the moment, these extracurriculars include gymnastics at both campuses, a rock climbing team through Sender One, and Lunch Clubs at Playa which include *extra everything* from baton instruction to art to math league. For some of these clubs, we assign external teachers while for others, our teachers manage the clubs.

Some families have voiced concerns regarding additional fees for extracurricular activities and I would like to discuss this a bit.



We would like for everything to be covered under tuition. We cover a *lot* of programs and continue to do more and more as we grow. Part of our unique goal at the school is to provide kids with exceptional opportunities to find their passion. It is not uncommon for us to bring in classes or workshops for just one or two students if that is what they are interested in. However, we don't always have the funding to bring in everything. I am able to create partnerships within the community to build out programs that are financially easier for families through the school than if they are outside of school. Most of our classes are significantly less expensive for families if we facilitate them. We support students in traveling to and from these programs so families don't have to worry about scheduling limitations. We work in partnerships with families to bring in many of the desired programs.

When families come to tour our school, I often mention that flexibility is needed to navigate this robust traveling program. When we remain in the classroom, there is a smaller possibility for unforeseen variables. When we travel, there are many variables we must be prepared for:

- The weather is always something we are paying attention to, and it might change our travel plans.
- No matter what, some kids will have to use the bathrooms before departing.
- A student becomes ill, or loses their favorite hat!
- A teacher calls out sick and we need to rearrange plans.
- A theatre performance is postponed due to a problem with the cast.
- We get an email the same week from a partner organization that has tickets for us, and we want to jump on it before it's gone.

Most schools go on one field trip a year. They have been to the same one place for years and so have the teachers.

We are traveling multiple times a week to many new places. We have become experts in hidden gems in LA. We track all our vehicles and work hard with staff and parents to stick within our timeframe of traveling. Travelling isn't easy and it's expensive, but it is extremely important in providing our students with a well-rounded education that goes beyond text. It is how we support the development of global citizenship and build respect and empathy for our world.

Traveling challenges also help our students realize that things don't always go as planned, and that that's ok. We can pivot and grow. I know it can sometimes be frustrating as parents when plans change, and a field trip is added or switched. We do try to avoid this- unless we can't (some reasons as shown above) or if the experience is too good to

miss! We truly appreciate your patience and partnership as we bring these opportunities to our students.

Argo operates on a year-long schedule. We are open September through August (12 months) while many traditional schools close in June (9 months). We are designed this way to allow for experiential learning and travel. Students should not be sitting at desks for 6 hours a day- much less 8 hours a day!

## School Model

We have been asked *what model we use for our school?* Finland's school model is the model we most closely resemble. When we investigated national and international models it became clear that Finland's schools were not only excelling internationally in the field of education but were aligned with our goals and philosophy. In Finland, schools prioritize outdoor play and travel. Many schools use the EOC (education outside of the classroom model) and Finland students continue to far exceed most countries in mathematics, science, and reading.

Finland's model can be summed up as: A focus on students' individual needs where teachers and administrators prioritize students' overall well-being and development. They begin with the individual in a collective environment of equality. Their foundation for kids to be given time to explore the world and find their passions, prioritize strong pupil/teacher relationships, and an emphasis on citizenship are values strongly linked to the development of highly confident and happy adults. For the fifth year in a row, Finland has been voted as the happiest country in the world by the United Nations-sponsored World Happiness Report.

## Teachers & Staff

Next, I'd like to talk about one of the most important aspects of our school: our teachers and staff.

*How do we hire our teachers and staff?* For each position, we are looking for the very best person for that job. The qualifications I look for in our design and engineering teacher are very different from the qualifications I look for in a math or Spanish teacher, or even between a preschool and middle school teacher. We are fortunate that in our school we have the ability to hire experts in various fields to teach our students. For other positions, I look for single or multiple subject teaching credentials. And yet for other positions, I look for a degree related to a certain area or a certain level of expertise in a given field. Many of our Spanish teachers did not go to school in the US and hold equivalent degrees in education from their countries. All of our preschool staff must have a state minimum of early childhood education classes and many hold a BA or MA. We have recently been

hiring preschool staff who have finished their degrees and were interns at our school as part of their coursework.

Because our teaching methodology is very different from many traditional schools, we have found it to be more difficult to train teachers who have been in a traditional classroom and to transition to our Project-Based classroom- versus a newer teacher who may be open to collaborative work versus a lecturing/rote memorization teaching style.

For every teaching position, teacher candidates must submit a federal background check called a livescan, they must teach a sample class, they must attend a field trip, they must submit writing samples in-person, and take specific tests related to their fields of expertise. We are also looking for teachers who love learning themselves and enjoy traveling and working with our kids in the field. When a teacher is engaged and excited about what they are teaching, students become more interested in the subject. These experiences also allow for a stronger student-teacher bond as teachers in the field help students find their footing during a hike or spend time just playing together at the beach. This bond leads to a strong trust between teacher and student that is palpable in the classroom. The student knows that their teacher cares about them and knows them deeply. Students are able to rely on teachers and open up to them more easily when struggling with academics or a peer issue.

Of the teachers that have been with us for over one year, 44% have stayed with us for over three years. Four years ago, we only employed 12 staff members. Today we employ 28. An average private school attrition rate is 16% annually. We are currently at 17% at Argo. When we look at attrition for staff who have been with us for over 1 year, the rate drops to 11%. The challenge we encounter at our school is that for many, this is the first experience they have with experiential learning (our travel). Many teachers, both older and younger, know the research and believe in what we are doing, which is why they are attracted to and join our school. However, the reality of not teaching in a classroom daily, even if they believe in that methodology, is harder than many know. The first year is a pivotal time for many to see if we are a good match for them and if they are a good match for us. After working in many schools where subpar teachers were kept merely to avoid teacher turnover, or in public schools where it was almost impossible to fire a teacher, I vowed that we would not keep a teacher who was not the very best for our students. As Paul stated before, we invest a lot in our teachers and are focused on having the best teaching team.

There have been some questions about substitute teachers and how we hire and utilize them. We rely on subs anytime a staff member calls out sick or is out for travel/personal reasons. Most schools use an outside service for substitutes. Many schools simply don't know who is going to show up at the school on those occasions and subs are provided with lesson plans upon arrival. We use a service as well if needed. During the pandemic, these services became difficult with so many schools needing subs. However, we have also always relied on our own subs (who also go through all the background checks as our teachers). The benefit of hiring our own subs is that they know our students and have

a rapport at the school and an appreciation for how we work. A substitute's job is to first keep all our kids safe and second, to keep them engaged and supported in the lesson plan that was provided by the absent teacher. A substitute job is a unique position. Substitutes usually have a several other jobs or vocations which allow them the flexibility to take on the flexible role. Some of our substitutes are retired teachers, college students, students in their young adult life pursuing a creative field of art or music, or people working from home or at night in the restaurant and food industry. Most of our substitute teachers will only stay with us for a year or two before moving on to a full-time teaching position with us or another school, or in a different profession altogether.

## Additional Roles

With the growth of our school, there are three areas we will be focusing on regarding high-level new headcount:

1. **Daily Operations and Student Health and Wellness** - This position will work closely with students and teachers to oversee field trip/studies programs and social- emotional support and case work.
  - a. After a lengthy interview process, we hired Acasia Vicknair, who has been a parent at our school since 2015. Acasia was the Director of Operations for a mental health consulting firm managing daily operations, training facilitators, running group counseling sessions, and consulting with behavioral healthcare organizations and government agencies. Acasia started her career in corporate event planning and brings a wealth of knowledge and insight to our team as well as a deep understanding of our school's culture and vision. We couldn't be more excited to welcome Acasia to our administration team.
2. **Development** - As we continue to grow, we will be utilizing several private school consultants to support the school's advancements in the areas of admissions, development, and strategic planning.
3. **Curriculum and Course Work Development** - We will be hiring additional support to work with us in the implementation, tracking, and advancement of curriculum and our Diversity and Inclusion work. We have recently hired JLove Calderon, Co-Founder & CEO of Inspire Justice, who was recommended by our wonderful parent and co-chair of our DEI committee, Kamala Avila-Salmon. Inspire Justice specializes in transformative justice training and social impact advising — giving clients the means to become powerful, well-informed social change agents. I'm looking forward to sharing the community work we will be engaging in.

## Hiring Family Members

This brings me to another question about how we hire staff and teachers in regard to our parent community.

Some of our staff/teachers started with us and later transitioned their kids to our schools. Others started as parents and their kids were already enrolled. There are pros and cons to hiring parents. A con is if the parent/position isn't a good fit, it can impact both their personal and professional relationship at the school. A pro is that having a child at the school while working at the school, the motivation for the work is deep. Personally, I have always worked hard for all my students and it's an additional benefit knowing my kids are receiving this gift of an education.

Also, our community is filled with such incredible talent and skill sets. Carrie, mother of Julia, is our chef and is not only a culinary expert but also works at Boeing. Our other chef Maria, mother to Luca and Nico, has worked in the culinary field for years as a private chef, a recipe tester, food stylist and as a cook in different restaurants. I've talked previously about Acasia's skills as a Director of Operations and mental health case work and the list continues for any parent we have brought on. It is never our goal specifically to hire a parent, but it is our goal to hire the very best in the field. We are so lucky to have this community of amazing professionals who are also committed to building our school for their kids and all our kids. I'm so grateful to you all for what you bring to our school.

## Staff Separations

Finally, I do want to talk about how we as a community handle a staff member or teacher leaving. Due to the nature of our school, students and families form very close relationships with our staff. It's a blessing that many of our students have had teachers and staff in their lives for years. You don't always find that in larger schools or schools that switch teachers every year. However, this can lead to much deeper feelings when someone leaves our community. Our policy, as with many organizations, is to respect the privacy of all Argo staff, and in doing so, we do not provide specifics about why someone has chosen to leave or comment on their personal affairs. We do encourage staff members to write their own letter to the community if they so wish. We also ask that the community supports them in their transition and do not put staff in a position to answer personal questions to which they may or may not feel comfortable answering. We feel fortunate that we continue to maintain good relationships with many of our staff that have left our school and, if appropriate, will continue to keep these relationships when they benefit our students and community.

## Communication

This leads me to discuss communication. *How do we communicate as a school and as a*

### *school community?*

Communication is one of the biggest challenges schools face and we are not excluded from this struggle, unfortunately. We have heard feedback over the years that we are sending too many communications and it's overwhelming for families, or that we are sending too few communications, or our communications aren't streamlined (emails, newsletters, Brightwheel) leaving families unsure about who to communicate with and how best to do so. This past fall when we were transitioning to our new campus and expanding our preschool, we were highly focused on our students, teachers, and day-to-day operations, that we realized we did not do a good job at communicating with our community and for that we (I) are truly sorry. I should have been more aware how all these changes were affecting families. The change for many parents using our busing system meant that parents were not onsite daily as they had previously, thus creating a void of communication which in turn left many feeling disconnected and anxious. As a school we have decided to put the following into place:

- We will hold "Coffee Meetings" once a month at each campus with myself and key administrators to answer parent questions and discuss current school events and activities.
- We will conduct family surveys twice a year.
- We will go back to holding our parent-teacher conferences in person at school three times a year versus on Zoom. Our next conference is February 10th!
- We are creating a PA (Parent Association) for parents to be more involved and help create more opportunities for parent involvement on campus.

We recently started our school-wide newsletter which many families have said is helpful. We look forward to more feedback about this in our survey that will be sent out shortly.

A few key communications we currently have in place:

**1.School Calendar:** If you haven't done so already, you can download our school calendar to your personal calendar. We do our very best to keep this updated on a daily basis. Please remember: there are trips we take that may sometimes changed due to rain or a change in teacher or class schedule or added due to an opportunity. We do not like making changes- it's not easy for us- but we understand with our model it is sometimes necessary. We ask that families check this calendar weekly or keep it uploaded on a personal calendar for convenience. On the online calendar, when you click on the activity it will remind you if your child needs anything special like walking shoes or a swimsuit.

My goal is always to plan for the week over the weekend.... but that doesn't always happen for me. Some of you do that very well!

**2. Brightwheel:** Teachers also try to update everyone the day before an activity to remind parents of anything special they will need. Brightwheel is also the way to communicate emergencies. An example of that is if someone other than you is picking up your child from school. Teachers need to be updated on your approved pick-up list and we will check for ID when they arrive. It is also through Brightwheel that teachers will communicate with families about the day's events. Some of our teachers are amazing with Brightwheel and some are working with me to improve this communication. Our specialty teachers do not have access to Brightwheel so you will typically not see pictures or updates on these classes. We also can't arrange for special pictures of your child and friends on Brightwheel. The goal for our teachers is to document each class they have and briefly describe what is happening so you can see your child and add to the conversations you have at home.

**3. Email:** Email communications are important to use to contact your child's teachers. If you have concerns or questions, they are the best person to contact first. For elementary and middle school, you can contact your child's homeroom teacher or any teacher directly. If you have already contacted them and need additional support, we ask that you contact Dina for preschool or Acasia or myself for elementary and middle school.

**4. Academics:** If your child is 3 ½ and up, they receive an Independent Learning Plan that covers all your child's learning goals. If there are any challenges or developments that your child's teacher is concerned about or wants to share, they will reach out to you directly. If you are concerned, you can reach out to your child's teacher directly. Sometimes families are concerned that because their child doesn't have homework in our older grades that they don't know where their child is in coursework. Working in many schools that assign homework, I often found parents having the same struggle as when the worksheets that went home were not enough information for parents to know where their child was in their coursework. For our older students, we are looking into a platform that allows parents, teachers, and students to share their project work and assignments. Due to our small class sizes and individual tracking system, we are tracking your child's learning progress weekly. We do not update parents weekly unless there is a special plan requiring this. In order for our teachers to do this they would need an additional workday.

**5. Newsletter:** We post all weekly and monthly updates in our newsletter which goes out on Wednesdays.

I'd also like to discuss how we handle concerns from our community.

It is the greatest privilege of my life (outside of my family) to be serving your children. In the beginning, I thought I could make every family happy who wanted this educational model. It probably seems clear to everyone that that cannot be possible- but as you know I tend to believe in the impossible- and I really wanted to try. As we have grown over the

last few years, however, I have come to understand that I, along with this administration, cannot give everyone everything they want. Sometimes it's because the request goes against our core philosophy, and sometimes it's because multiple families have strongly opposing requests, and sometimes it's because it doesn't fit into our current budget.

We are guided by our mission and core values in all the decisions that we make and rely on our board for advisers for support and guidance in the more complicated matters. My hope is that you know how much I, and this administration, care about your children and your family. We will not always see eye to eye on everything, but I can promise you we will always be open to hearing from you and discussing everything. That is our commitment to you: that even when we don't agree we will hear you and want to hear from you. If there are challenges you are having with the school please come and meet with myself, Paul or Dina. We are usually able to figure out these challenges together. However, if we aren't able to find a solution and if you feel those challenges are things that are most important to you, also know we understand that position. We hope we are the school that best fits your family's wants and needs, but if not, we will help you find a school that best fits what you are looking for. We know we aren't the best fit for everyone, but we will always do our best to serve you in your choices and help support you in any decisions you make.

*“There are three ways to ultimate success: The first way is to be kind. The second way is to be kind. The third way is to be kind.”*

*-Mr. Rogers*