For more than 125 years, Ursuline Academy has been at the forefront of high-quality student education, leadership empowerment, and service in a global society. Our 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, Vision 2022, balances the rich history and tradition of our school with the innovative skills and values our students need to succeed and learn today. We are proud of the groundwork laid thus far in making our vision a reality.

Transformative Learning

The past two years were instrumental in further shaping Ursuline’s reputation for a world-class education. Social and business innovation classes were introduced to students across all grade levels, strengthening their ability to identify a business or societal problem, collect data, and present a thoughtful and empathetic solution. These students joined forces with the burgeoning entrepreneur club to put their ideas into action in regional and global innovation competitions. Students in the Upper School won first place this year in the pitch competition Delaware Launch, for their creation of “Bliss Box,” a collection of kinesthetic objects for use as coping mechanisms at mental health facilities. For the second year in a row, Ursuline students were also semi-finalists in the Business category of the global entrepreneurship competition, Diamond Challenge, for their invention of “The Next Step,” a way to help children safely get in and out of wheelchairs. Currently these students are seeking a provisional patent for their idea with pediatric physical therapists who heard their virtual pitch at Diamond Challenge.

In Middle School, students are focusing on data analytics and learning to gather information, summarize it in a visual infographic, pitch it, and test a prototype. For example, students in 7th grade created Grand TECHers, a one-on-one tutorial teaching senior citizens how to embrace more technology. In our Lower School, students are encouraged to let their innate creativity “Wander and Wonder,” and this year were online responding to prompts from the newly-created "I Wonder" book that probes deeper into animal characteristics, behaviors, and their unique design. The Wander ’n Wonder program, now in its second year, is making use of Cool Spring Reservoir behind the school, directly observing nature, and applying that knowledge to answer real world problems like how to design safer wind turbines or understanding how our community’s water supply works. This program, along with our environmental curriculum and eco-friendly facilities, received national recognition this spring. Ursuline was chosen by the U.S. Department of Education as a 2020 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School! Ursuline is one of only two Delaware schools and 55 in the United States to receive this honor. These are just a few examples of the transformative learning taking place thanks to our innovative and talented faculty.
Financial literacy curriculum has been integrated across grade levels to provide a better understanding of global economics and business operations. The Middle School kicked off participation in Junior Achievement, the world’s largest organization for educating students on entrepreneurship, work readiness, and financial literacy through experiential, hands-on programs and real-life simulations. The Upper School partnered with the University of Delaware’s Center for Economic Education and Entrepreneurship to offer professional development for teachers and learning opportunities for students. The partnership has resulted in introducing two new class options for upperclassmen in the 2020-21 school year: economics as an elective and personal finance 101 with career mapping.

It is crucial to Ursuline’s mission to attract and retain a talented and diverse faculty and staff that is representative of the student-body and community that we serve. In early 2020, we welcomed our new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) coordinator, Donna May. In her role, she oversees the newly expanded DEI Council, which is comprised of students, faculty, Board of Trustees members, parents, and alumnae, and ensures efforts to promote and maintain diversity within the Ursuline family and within the HR selection committee. These efforts expand upon those of the DEI task force formed in 2018. Highlights include professional development and training for faculty and staff including a presentation on cultural competence by DeVon Jackson, M.S., a student and faculty climate survey, and reviewing inclusivity throughout the Academy. This year we partnered with NemMet Minority Recruitment and HBCU Career Center to standardize panel-style interviews with uniform questions to reduce unconscious bias among candidates. The DEI Council is tasked with developing a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan by the end of 2020. This plan will serve as a roadmap, detailing specific, measurable, and time-bound goals for addressing bias, prejudice, discrimination, and racism. We look forward to sharing the Action Plan with the Ursuline Community. Read more about our work to foster a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment, and one that prepares the Ursuline community to go out into the world and be change makers.

It is important to note that our talented faculty and staff have played a key role in carrying out the vision of the strategic plan. To further support our efforts, faculty and academic leadership formed the following task forces: STEM, Humanities, Global Competency,
Financial Literacy, Student Experience, Faculty Experience, How Girls Learn, Ages & Stages, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. We are grateful for their work to bring positive change by progressing Ursuline Academy towards the goals of Vision 2022.

Funding our Future & Facility Enhancements

The new Fusco Student Life Center opened in January 2019. From the first morning we officially opened the doors, our students have revelled in the abundance of light, enjoyed using the purpose built classrooms, and marveled at the open space. The atrium has quickly become one of the most popular spaces, which overlooks the Cool Spring Reservoir. The focal point is a beautiful wood table crafted by Elena Delle Donne ’08. Students can also be found in the UA Café throughout the day while on break and between classes. Architecturally, the library is the most special room in the building. As the former chapel, many of the original elements remain including the stained glass windows, wooden beams, and balcony. The confessional rooms were turned into small group study rooms. The original confessional doors were moved to the new chapel. The attention to details make this project one in which old meets new in a truly elegant way that the entire Ursuline community can be proud of. We learned in a survey distributed this past fall that parents are looking forward to seeing the momentum of the Fusco Student Life Center project continue throughout the rest of the facilities.

This summer we began renovating the Early Childhood wing which will be complete in time for the 2020-21 school year. The beautifully updated wing features new floors, cabinets, bathrooms, and an enhanced space for before and after school care and nap times. We are excited to announce a new project is underway with the renovation of our Middle School science lab. The science lab will include a live, educational moss wall, new microscopes, advanced technology and equipment, and an open floor plan with stations for hands-on labs. We are also exploring upgrades to student dining options with vendors utilizing organic farm to table and local food sources, expanded offerings in dietary options, and student engagement through culinary clubs, nutritional presentations, and food tastings. The Board of Trustees Building and Grounds Committee, led by Chair Charles Ryan, AIA, continually evaluates our master plan for facility enhancements, including campus buildings and infrastructure.

Ursuline’s rigorous fiscal stewardship allows us to not only continue this growth, but to also ensure access and affordability of an Ursuline Academy education for all students. It is notable that this truly comes full-circle for our alumnae. While the national standard for women donating to their alma mater is eight percent, during the 2019-20 fiscal year more than 16 percent of Ursuline alumnae gave back! This year we established a Planned Giving Program and retained an attorney who facilitated free workshops on simple wills, guardianship, and estate planning. Anyone including Ursuline in their estate plan is automatically added to the St. Angela Merici Heritage Society. Planned gifts are a wonderful way to help grow Ursuline’s endowment. The endowment is critically important today as it provides annual financial resources to our school. It is a permanent
investment fund, intended to provide perpetual support to our educational mission. Income from the endowment fund is directed toward important school priorities such as: attracting and retaining excellent faculty through professional development opportunities, supplemented salaries, and improved classroom resources; maintaining affordability of an Ursuline education by providing relief to the school's dependence on tuition for our operating budget, and providing financial assistance to deserving and qualified students; and sustaining a high-quality environment for learning through campus and facilities maintenance, technology upgrades, and reserves for future challenges. The fund is board-designated and professionally managed, under the oversight of our Board of Trustees' finance committee.

Embracing the Ursuline Experience

Through embracing Ursuline’s mission, students emerge equipped to be self-confident, strong leaders, with anchoring personal values that last a lifetime. During the 2019-20 school year we added a new role, welcoming Michelle Hogan as our Campus Minister & Mission Effectiveness Coordinator. Michelle is leading spiritual and mission-focused activities throughout all divisions, imbuying our Ursuline identity into daily life. We also began incorporating our Portrait of a Graduate values into daily practice by recognizing students representing these values in all divisions, celebrating “Disciples, Citizens, Thinkers and Pioneers” after morning announcements, sharing during Family Fridays in the Lower School, with special pins of achievement in the Middle School, and reflecting on student success in these areas on report cards.

In addition to educating students on Ursuline’s values, we assembled a task force focused on research and professional development for faculty on the benefits of all-girls education. This research has resulted in recommended reading lists, faculty members attending and presenting at the National Coalition of Girls’ Schools: Educating Girls Symposium, inviting female speakers on campus, and updated curriculum and global challenge courses focused on women empowerment.

Launched in September 2017, our House System has fostered collaboration between schools and strengthened peer-to-peer relationships and mentorships. Excitement and awareness of the system has grown with more events, spirit points, house gear and color-coordinated lanyards for uniforms. Recent fun includes House recesses for students to play with their younger buddies, STEM pumpkin launch competition this past fall, House Wars, sitting together at mass, and more! Our appointed House System core team and committee will continue to build momentum on this as we look to invite our alumnae to participate.

Visit our website to view and learn more about Ursuline Academy’s Strategic Plan, Vision 2022.