

MOUNT ROYAL ACADEMY

Strategic Plan 2023 -2025

December 30, 2022

School Mission

Mount Royal Academy's mission is to educate the whole person through the spiritual, academic, and human formation of each student. We aim to develop holy, responsible, and qualified persons for all vocations within the Church, their families, and in their communities. Our aspirations direct all temporal efforts toward building Catholic culture and our Father's eternal kingdom.

Reflecting on Our History To Prepare for the Future

Since its inception in 1994, Mount Royal Academy has been offering an affordable, high-quality Catholic education in the classical tradition to students and families in the diocese of Manchester, New Hampshire. What began nearly three decades ago as a small elementary school, housed in the old Newport Hospital building, has steadily grown to include a preschool and liberal-arts college-preparatory high school, currently serving 214 students, ages 3 to 18, on a five-acre campus in the hills of New Hampshire's Dartmouth-Lake Sunapee Region.

The first lay-founded school to be recognized by the Catholic Diocese of Manchester, MRA operates independently of the diocesan system. Separately incorporated and governed by its own board of trustees, it is administered by an experienced and dedicated team of educators.

From day one, the Catholic faith has remained foundational to the mission and identity of the school. Faith infuses all aspects of school life. Prayer and the study of theology are central to its culture and curriculum. While two-thirds of students are baptized Catholics, a full third come from other and various faith backgrounds. In a spirit of inclusion and hospitality, our approach to religious education is one of exposure to, rather than imposition of the faith. A friendly, cooperative, and respectful environment underpins the entire learning experience for all students at the school.

Mount Royal Academy understands that the gift of a classical education grounded in the Catholic tradition, inclusive of a strong formation in the faith, and supported by a vital Christian community, is both lasting and transformative. The board and leadership of the school aspire to offer an MRA education to as many students and families as may desire it, because we believe we are building the Kingdom of God by preparing young people for lives of holiness and purpose, and by serving families willing to join our community and impart the enduring virtues and intellectual heritage of the Catholic faith to their children.

As a school that educates the whole child and engages the whole family, Mount Royal Academy values its close collaboration with parents and will continue to foster that vital partnership in

manifold and meaningful ways in the years to come—by improving communication, expanding parent educational offerings, and assuring the affordability and quality of the Catholic classical education it offers to families of all faiths in the Sunapee area.

As we look ahead and plan for a vibrant future together, MRA will weigh ways to expand and enhance its educational ministry where and when the greatest good can be served, and if its core values and mission can be more fully realized, without undue compromise or risk. We, the school’s governing board and leadership, pledge to meet the needs of current and prospective students and families in a spirit of generosity, hospitality, and prudence. Our goal is to continue to explore and inform decisions about programs, priorities, and strategic investments in a collaborative and transparent manner that builds community and trust.

The strategic goals and directions of the school must be shared and broadly supported, so we fully expect our conversations and discernments about certain key areas of school life will remain ongoing and depend on the community’s sustained participation for success.

After the reflections and discussions of the past six months, we are prepared to move forward, from where we are today, with a suite of strategic initiatives that the school community has collectively prioritized for purposeful action or focused study. What follows is an articulation of commonly held hopes for the school, of do-able dreams, that we believe we can realize together over the next three years.

Institutional Charisms

Gifts in Service of Mission

Mount Royal Academy acknowledges that its work and distinctive gifts as a Catholic educational institution emanate from a loving and living God, who creates us for holiness and union with Him in eternity. MRA’s ministry and its institutional charisms are, by their nature, designed for and dedicated to the service of God’s Kingdom and God’s people.

As both a learning community and a faith community, we are called to an authentic expression of those graces which we have been given for the advancement of our mission. In the words of Saint John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, “the charisms are received in gratitude.” When we stay true to them, these gifts endow us with a power to achieve more than we might imagine in even the best laid plans or designs of our own.

What, then, are our gifts? The dialogues and discernments of the past year confirm for us a set of charisms and reasons-for-being, which we believe animate our success, bless the children and families we serve, and deserve our ongoing protection and prioritization. They include:

✦ Catholic Education

We form the hearts, minds, and souls of young people in the Catholic tradition, passing on to them the invaluable intellectual and spiritual heritage of the Roman Catholic faith. A Catholic education is a centuries-old praxis of teaching and learning that places the whole child in an educational

environment where they are known, loved, and called to realize their fullest God-given potential. We believe nothing more valuable or lasting can be bestowed upon a student entrusted to our care.

✦ **Classical Curriculum**

Centering our pedagogy in a Classical canon and a study of the *Trivium* (grammar, logic, and rhetoric), MRA's curriculum invites students into a rich and rigorous engagement with great works and great thinkers, whose impact on Western civilization has proven both enduring and profound. An education in the Latin language and close reading of the great books also equip students with the intellectual and critical thinking capacities required to pursue truth and the demands of any post-secondary training or professional paths they may choose.

✦ **Community**

No one learns alone. Students do not develop in a vacuum. Nor solely in a dyad with their teachers. They flourish in a community, where they can be assured that they belong and know they are loved. We foster a learning community in which all members—students, teachers, families, benefactors—benefit from the bonds they form with one another, where all have a place and a stake in the school's present and future.

✦ **Faithful Faculty**

The authentic witness of teachers is a powerfully formative experience for students and families. The way in which faculty model Christian virtues and fidelity to the teachings of the faith educates and enlightens the entire school community. Their witness represents a co-equal expression of professional excellence, one that complements subject-matter mastery and teaching acumen.

✦ **Partnership with Parents**

Parents are the first and primary educators of their children. Mount Royal Academy is privileged to partner with parents who are deeply committed to the quality of their children's learning experience, and who realize that the values their children learn are just as important as any instructional content. We approach this partnership in a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation, and genuinely appreciate the manifold ways in which parents strengthen and support the school's vibrancy and success.

✦ **Hospitality**

Mount Royal Academy's welcoming atmosphere ensures that families and students, regardless of their backgrounds or beliefs, feel accepted and at home. The practice of hospitality is a constituent dimension of the school's evangelical mission. We build community and bring Christ to those around us by first welcoming them as brothers and sisters. The sense of safety and warmth they experience at MRA fosters the growth and learning we strive to accomplish with each student.

✦ **Stable Leadership**

The School's Administrative team and governing Board of Trustees believe stability and consistency in leadership seed wisdom and right judgment. The generous service and tenure of those who lead

the school represent important sources of institutional knowledge and vision. We strive to support stable leadership at MRA, because of the advantages conferred by it.

✦ **Affordability**

The cost of a Mount Royal Academy education should never deter those who earnestly seek it. We are committed to making enrollment as economically fair and financially manageable for as many families as possible. We will assure access to scholarship assistance in as generous and sustainable a manner as prudence allows, balancing the resource needs and constraints of families with those of the institution and the integrity of our programs.

These eight charisms constitute our most defining and deeply felt qualities as an educational apostolate. Because they promote both excellence and cohesion within our school community, we will not mortgage them. Because they bless the children and families we serve today, we must uphold them. And because they are meant “for the holiness of the whole Body of Christ,” as Pope John Paul II also teaches in *Christifideles Laici*, we recognize our responsibility to share them as broadly as our shared zeal and God’s Holy Will ever impel us.

Our Pledges to the MRA Community and Guiding Principles

Mount Royal Academy hopes to pursue several strategic priorities that we believe reflect the most important and pressing needs and aspirations of the school community.

The inquiries and conversations that took place throughout 2022 shed light on several areas of strength (which we intend to build upon) as well as some aspects of school life that warrant improvement or ongoing attention. We are grateful for the high levels of engagement and participation that our community-wide surveys and listening sessions inspired. The school is blessed by many partners in mission. What has emerged so far from this collaborative discernment process is greater clarity about what any strategic initiatives must preserve, and what any investments or future interventions ought to accomplish.

This plan will lay out specific objectives and action steps expected to enhance our strengths and remediate deficiencies in the school’s programs and facilities. It will envision the MRA of tomorrow. But it will not lose sight of the promises that must be kept today. Specifically:

- ✦ Delivering a high-quality and affordable classical education that equips students for post-secondary success, and most importantly, prepares them for lives of sanctity and purpose.
- ✦ Maintaining Mount Royal’s Catholic culture and strong sense of community, even as it contemplates welcoming more families, some from other faith traditions, as well as potential expansion and future programmatic investments.
- ✦ Strengthening relationships: with families, with faculty, with alumni.

✦ Managing growth wisely.

These over-arching principles and priorities create the framework within which we intend to explore or implement any given initiatives. They will guide our way of proceeding, just as our gifts and strengths as a school community will serve as stars by which we hope to chart a future, in fidelity to our past.

Areas of Strategic Priority

✦ Incremental Enrollment Growth

Currently educating 214 students across grades, Mount Royal has seen healthy enrollment growth in the past three years. Overall, enrollment has climbed more than 15% in that timeframe. The number of students served in our pre-K program has doubled.

While some of these upticks can be traced to pandemic-related (and somewhat temporary) conditions in our marketplace—the fact that MRA resumed in-person instruction, for example, months before local public schools did so, led dozens of new families to transfer in—we have observed noteworthy demographic and structural factors likely to drive sustainable demand into the future.

First and foremost, the curriculum, culture, and affordability of MRA make it a distinct value and compelling choice for families in our geographic area. There is no other Catholic school in the diocese of Manchester offering a Classical education at the primary and secondary levels. Because we believe strongly in the educational advantages of our pedagogical approach, and because we consider it a service to the Diocese and families in our area, we will continue to offer a Classical education as MRA’s unique contribution to the faith-based private-school ecosphere in the region.

We serve the whole child and the whole family, so that families with children of varying learning styles and learning needs can feel confident that the educational needs of all can be met. Offering busy families a single school campus where children of all ages and learning profiles can thrive makes MRA a unique and attractive educational choice.

Though Mount Royal Academy has long extended generous financial aid where need exists, state-sponsored school-choice and scholarship programs have recently expanded the options for low- and middle-income families seeking private education for their children. Thanks to the initiatives of the Children’s Scholarship Fund and passage of the Educational Freedom Accounts bill in 2020, the cost of an MRA education is now within reach for more New Hampshire residents. And because there are more New Hampshire residents all the time, as the population of neighboring Merrimack County, one of the fastest growing regions in the state, continues to increase, we anticipate that inquiries and applications to MRA will continue to increase for the foreseeable future.

This presents Mount Royal with a credible economic case for expanding the number of students it enrolls. As a tuition-driven school, increases in enrollment often mean more resources to operate programs and balance our budget. But there are mission-driven reasons for growth, as well. Mount Royal Academy is an evangelical and evangelizing ministry that brings Christ to those who may not

know him, either because they are young, or because they have not experienced an authentic Christian community to inspire lives of faith.

These reasons (even pressures) to grow are real. But preserving low student-teacher ratios, small class sizes, and the family-feel of the school place their own, competing claims. We have heard the concerns and preferences that our stakeholders have shared with us. We, too, value the close-knit community and the relationships that MRA, at its current size, makes possible. We, too, share reservations about over-crowding and over-expansion.

A measured approach, then, and capping full enrollment at the current capacity of our facilities, offers us the most balanced solution for managing growth. This target entails growing enrollment 7.5% over the next three years and an incremental increase of about 17 students, across the entire program, in the same time frame.

It is our conviction that growth at this level and pace will compromise nothing about the culture or current cost structures of the school yet enable us to make an MRA education available to more students and families.

Average class sizes will remain essentially the same during this period. The school will not actively recruit for the sake of building entire additional classes at any grade level but will respond to organic growth and the needs of larger cohorts as they rise. Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms will serve approximately 13-14 students each. In grades 1 - 5, the average class size may grow from 15 to 16 students. Classes in the Junior High, which now average 11 students, and the High School, where 14 students typically fill a class, may see similarly modest increases.

✦ **Formalized Capital and Facilities Planning**

Determining and meeting our facilities needs requires prudent and thoughtful planning. The conversations and community inputs we invited in the fall of 2022 identified several issues and opportunities that deserve careful consideration, so that we prioritize properly and invest wisely. It is the determination of the Board, however, that the school has more to learn about these matters, before making any definitive decisions. Does the school need more or better instructional space? Worship space? Athletic facilities? When? At what grade-levels? And at what cost?

These questions require sufficient time and additional information to answer with confidence. Moreover, the needs of the campus may change as the student body grows toward full enrollment. To discern these matters rightly, therefore, a formal Capital and Facilities Planning Committee will be commissioned to study and set priorities over the next 18 months.

The school envisions a working committee, comprised of board members and others in the community with expertise in construction, real estate, facilities management, and finance to inform our planning.

✦ **Enhanced Scholarship and Philanthropic Revenue**

To maintain the affordability of Mount Royal for middle-income and large families, the school will continue to develop alternative revenue streams to augment net tuition income. The extent to which MRA can reduce its dependency on tuition dollars directly impacts its ability to operate at full enrollment and meet the demonstrated financial needs of families.

We believe we can assist more families in accessing state scholarship funds and increase the number and size of those awards. The New Hampshire Children's Scholarship Fund is a private charity that awards up to \$4,600 per pupil per year to New Hampshire students who are struggling in their current public school and seek to attend a private school that is a better fit for them and their learning needs. The State's Education Freedom Accounts provides funding up to \$2,500 per student per annum to eligible New Hampshire families earning up to 300% of the poverty line. Those additional funds can be allocated to pay for tuition, tutoring, online learning programs, educational supplies, internet connectivity, and other educational expenses.

Larger families, with three or more students enrolled at the school, would particularly benefit from better access to these alternative pools of financial aid moneys. By facilitating the process of applying for and securing those funds, Mount Royal anticipates not only offsetting tuition burdens for families but freeing up dollars currently allocated as institutional aid for other programmatic investments and school-wide improvements.

The generosity of Mount Royal's benefactors represents another critical source of support for the school. We are both fortunate and grateful in this regard because our community of donors already underwrites a reliable and substantial share of our annual operating budget.

The school will explore new ways to grow philanthropy in service of scholarship aid. At the same time, as the Capital and Facilities Planning Committee evaluates future campus needs and capital investments, stewarding and engaging our donors will prove critical to accomplishing the projects that are envisioned. With an eye to both the affordability and sustainability of the school, it is our goal to avoid burdensome levels of debt or significant tuition increases as vehicles for financing the school's operational or capital expenses.

✦ **Fiscal Stability and Higher Levels of Reserves**

We are stewards of the future sustainability of the school as well as servants of its present-day vitality. A balanced budget and the building of reserves will remain core principles in the management of our operations and finances.

Over the next three years, MRA aspires to build its current level of reserves to approximately one year's operating revenue. This growth can be achieved through a variety of methods, many described above, that will increase income, primarily through enrollment, philanthropy and more external sourcing of financial aid. Capital reserves at the seven-figure level will grant the school considerable freedom and flexibility to finance programmatic or facilities expenditures that may exceed its annual operating revenue.

✦ Alumni Relations and Faith Formation

We believe an MRA education is a lasting gift that serves our graduates throughout their lives, but our service to our students should not end at graduation. We desire lifelong relationships with the young people entrusted to us.

Now that the school nears its thirtieth anniversary, our oldest alumni are pursuing vocations in the world and in the Church, establishing careers, starting families, settling into and serving various communities. Meanwhile, our youngest alums are beginning to navigate adulthood, choose career paths, continue with their post-secondary education, and discover who God may be calling them to become as young adults.

Mount Royal, which catechized them and nurtured their faith from a young age, can continue to serve our alumni's post-graduation needs for faith-formation and Christian community, in ways that are formal and informal, through the creation of an Alumni Relations program. We propose establishing a founding committee in 2023 that will include alumni representatives to inform this work and design a program to best meet the social, spiritual, and professional needs of graduates.

Summary of Specific Action Steps and Interventions

Our strategic plan over the ensuing three years aims to strengthen both the sustainability of the school and the quality of its programs through the following specific initiatives:

I. Institutional Sustainability

✦ Achieve Three Years of Full Enrollment (AY24 – AY26)

By operating at full enrollment (approximately 230 students) for this period, the school can better meet existing demand and assess whether and what level of enrollment growth might make sense in the future.

✦ Undertake Tuition and Financial Aid Review (2023)

The school will complete a marketplace audit to inform decisions about tuition-pricing. It will review its institutional aid practices and policies. It will also seek ways to leverage additional resources, such as state scholarship programs, to meet demonstrated need.

✦ Convene Capital and Facilities Planning Committee (January 2023 to June 2024)

This working group will formally assess facility needs as well as opportunities. The goal and scope of its work will involve making informed recommendations to the Board of Trustees regarding capital investments necessary to meet the needs of our programs and students.

✦ **Conduct Comprehensive Faculty Compensation Review**

Retaining effective and qualified educators remains a linchpin to the academic success of our programs and students. Through a thorough analysis, the school will assess how its compensation policies can best support that goal.

II. Programmatic Enhancements

✦ **Empanel Faculty Curricular Review and Study Group (Spring 2023 to Spring 2024)**

Questions about the role of digital learning and the use of technology within the context of a Classical Education emerged in our discovery process and community-wide conversations. These issues merit careful deliberation. The school’s board and leadership believe this exercise can be best led by the school’s faculty, who understand the goals of the curriculum and the needs of our students. We envision a year-long process that respects the school’s existing curriculum, while also yielding a set of recommendations that address the appropriate integration of technology and other aspects of teaching and learning at MRA. Administrative leadership and the Board will then take those findings under advisement.

✦ **Create an Alumni Relations Program**

A Committee will convene in 2023 with a view to designing and launching the program in the school’s 30th Anniversary year in 2024.

✦ **Evaluate Academic Advising/College Counseling**

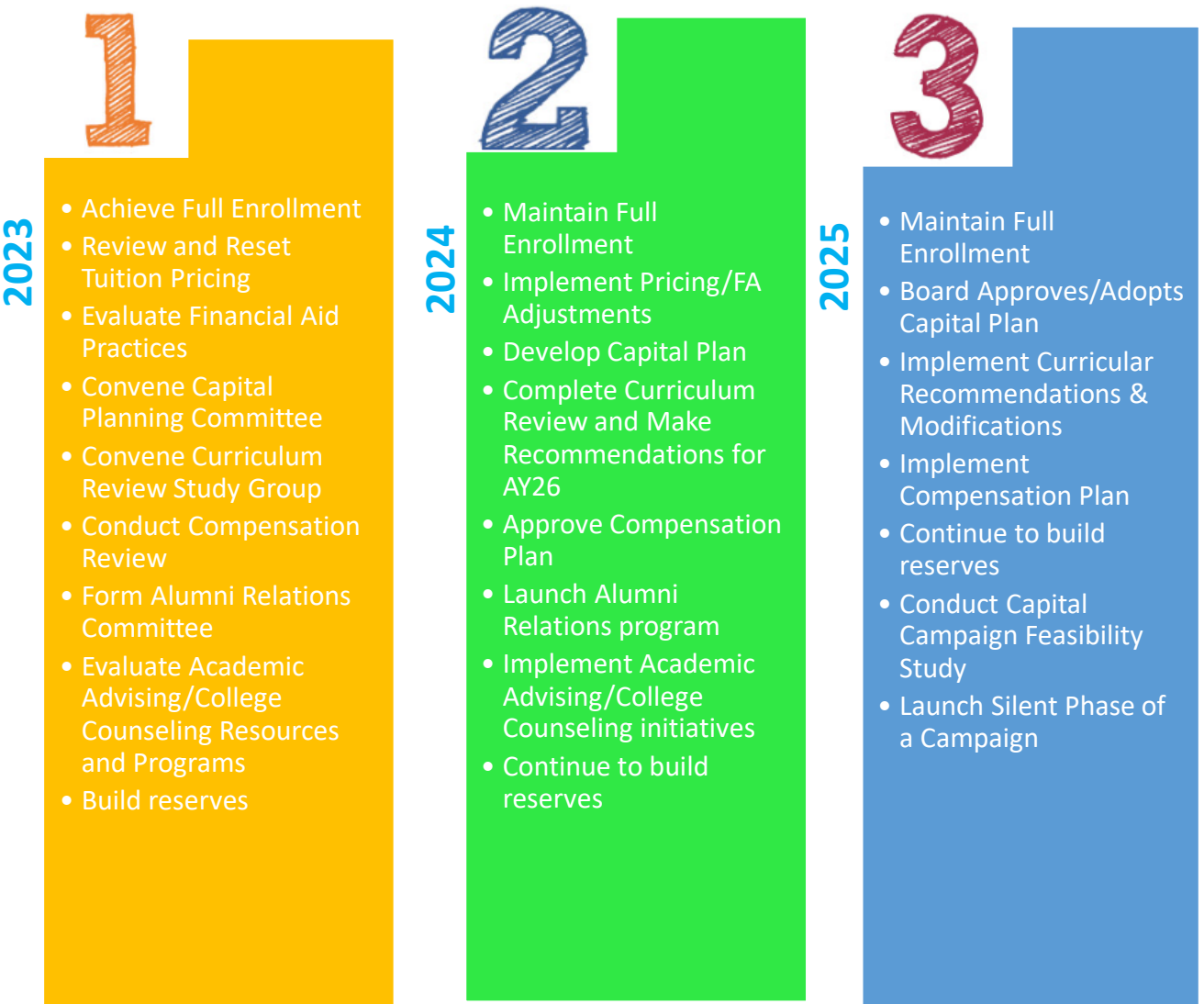
The Administrative team has oversight and responsibility for this area of student services. In the coming academic year, the headmaster and others will assess the current program to determine whether additional tools or staffing are required to augment college counseling and career exploration for high school students. The results of this audit and any proposed programmatic changes that result will be communicated with the board, as well as all students and parents in the high school.

Implementation Timelines

- I. The school will begin the **Sustainability interventions** outlined above in the first half of 2023. This will allow MRA to:
 - Achieve and manage incremental growth
 - Realize revenue gains in AY24
 - Continue building reserves
 - Position the school for opportunistic capital investments as they may emerge
 - Prepare for a capital campaign, should needs and opportunities align

- II. Mount Royal aims to *implement* as many **Sustainability** initiatives and finalize as many **Programmatic Enhancements** as possible by AY25.
- III. The school will prioritize, over the next three years, programmatic investments and enhancements that address the following key areas:
 - Student post-secondary outcomes
 - Alumni engagement
 - Faculty retention

Abstract and Summary of Action Plan and Timeline



Conclusion

These are the measures we aspire to begin and advance over the next three years. We trust that they will build upon the good work that Mount Royal Academy has accomplished over the past three decades. We pray that God will bless it and bring it to fruition, for the sake of our entire school community, our wider local community, the Church, and the World. We pray that our labors succeed at serving our mission to educate the young and build Our Father's eternal kingdom. In the words of the Psalmist, we beseech you, O God: "Do not forsake the work of your hands." (Psalm 138). Like You, we will not forsake the work of ours.

A Note about Methodology and Process

A broad and inclusive process of soliciting stakeholder input and feedback began with a schoolwide survey conducted from September 14 to September 30, 2022. The instrument was informed by groundwork laid by Focus Groups and the MRA Strategic Planning Subcommittee.

MRA's strategic planning survey was distributed electronically to more than 200 individuals. More than 120 community members submitted responses. Highlights and noteworthy findings were presented at three separate 90-minute meetings on the Mount Royal Academy campus in October 2022. Two community-wide evening meetings and one faculty after-school meeting were conducted. Approximately 75 people took part.

Mount Royal Academy's Board of Trustees took up the findings in a retreat in November 2022. This report reflects the strategic priorities established by the Board in response to the community's input.