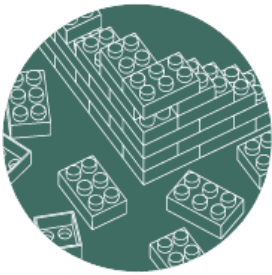


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Signals

## Mission-Based Fiscal & Campus Planning

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# WHAT'S POSSIBLE?

In October 2025, [SAIS pulse surveyed](#) member school business officers, with 69% reporting that the financial health of their school is strong/very strong, down slightly from 72.7% in 2024. Despite a healthy financial position, deferred maintenance projects are considered a top risk by 39% of SAIS business officers. Further, 58% of schools planned significant capital projects beginning in 2025 – up from 55% in 2024 – and 21% of business officers report investing in capital improvements was a primary financial goal. **Whitefield Academy** – located in Smyrna, GA, and serving more than 950 students in PreK through grade 12 – shares how schools can remain laser-focused on mission while campus planning and sustaining sound finances.



## Campus Planning with Mission & Vision In Sight

The mission of Whitefield Academy is “to be a Christ-centered college preparatory school that bolsters Christian families in rearing young people who go on to college and life with a passion for learning, others ahead of self, and the living and active Jesus.” To align with the mission, leadership is constantly asking critical questions about all that is done, including careful consideration of campus and facility plans that provide the people, spaces, and resources necessary for academic excellence and for every student to thrive.

Every five years, the school undertakes an extensive strategic planning process that includes campus planning. Students, faculty, families, and alumni are surveyed and meet in focus groups as part of this process to ensure that their feedback is considered as the school builds plans and priorities. Head of School Dr. Kevin Bracher says, “We are in community and communication with all of these groups regularly, so we aren’t often that surprised by their input, but every once in a while unexpected ideas surface.” The input from these various constituencies helps leadership better define and shape plans for the campus and the future.



Bracher describes the strategic plan as a living document, referenced often and updated regularly based on progress, additional feedback, and unforeseen changes and circumstances. The leadership team ensures campus planning remains current, with Bracher working with the board of trustees to report regularly on progress and to seek additional guidance.

## **Prioritizing People When Planning**

Whitefield's current strategic plan includes a primary goal to "deepen Christ-centered transformational learning for each student." Bracher shares that this particular goal has specific implications for the people the school hires and how they are compensated, the design of a new Learning Commons currently under construction, stewardship of existing facilities, financial investment in the long-term future, and many other intentional decisions that help to cultivate student passions in alignment with the school mission.

"We place a high priority on a relational approach with students and families; we meet the varying needs of each individual student by ensuring they are deeply known," shares Bracher.





Toward this end, one project in the current strategic plan involved adding faculty in key areas to ensure that students had more support and opportunities for personalized instruction and interaction. Financial investments were planned and implemented to add new positions and revise roles. Examples included adding a full-time associate teacher in every lower school classroom in addition to the lead teacher, providing a student learning specialist for each division level, and increasing opportunities and time for faculty to work collaboratively to meet the needs of specific students.

Bracher says, “The results have been very positive in meeting the needs of all students, as well as teachers feeling a strong sense of having the support and collaboration they need to do so.”

## **Designing Spaces That Shape Culture & Community**

Considering the people leading and learning within the walls of Whitefield, the school began construction on a new Learning Commons, planned to open in August of 2026. The building has been in the making for many years and will have a significant impact on the Whitefield student experience. The Learning Commons will provide new learning spaces – an expanded innovation lab; broadcasting/podcasting lab; research library; academic support; and technology, group, and individual study spaces – as well as a new dining hall to accommodate growing enrollment.



The new facility will also feature a variety of meeting and gathering spaces for small groups and large groups, a student-run cafe, an outdoor patio area, and a prayer room. Intentional pre-construction planning will result in spaces and opportunities for building community, allowing students and parents, faculty and staff, and alumni and guests to fellowship together.

The school has been fiscally disciplined in constructing its last three major buildings without adding any long-term debt, which avoids placing strain on the operating budget. Before breaking ground, the school obtains commitments from donors, who have historically honored their commitments at a high level. Notably, Whitefield's most recent capital campaign required \$40 million in funding, achieved through full, written commitments from donors. "I think what might be seen as 'creative' today is simply following conservative principles," says Bracher of funding for major projects.

Beyond following development best practices, Bracher attributes much of the school's capital campaign success to remaining clearly aligned to the school's stated mission. The board of trustees have made intentional efforts to support sustainability in leadership that is able to cultivate mission alignment throughout the organization.





## Planning for the Future

For Whitefield Academy, stewarding the school's resources is part of its financial responsibility. To serve the community in alignment with the school's mission gives significance and meaning to maintenance efforts.

Prioritizing repairs, replacement, and renewal is critical and is viewed as a collaborative process that requires the consultation of wise counsel. Whitefield involves the COO and CFO who work in conjunction with facilities maintenance staff, partners, and other key staff. The team maintains a record of ongoing and current needs and projects. Safety and security needs receive first priority, along with items that are considered "mission critical." Then, various groups – building and grounds committee, leadership team, and other staff with particular expertise or interest – are consulted to identify additional priorities. Ultimately, Dr. Bracher as the head of school makes the final decision – with approval from the board on certain threshold spending amounts – on priorities for larger projects, but not without significant collaboration and feedback to ensure optimal prioritization.

Because these decisions ultimately involve money, leadership pays careful and continuous attention to its PPRSM (provision for plant replacement, renewal, and special maintenance) budget and reserves to use when needed, while seeking to maintain a benchmark amount in reserves equal to 20% of the current operating budget.



Getting the data necessary to make informed decisions on where to invest has grown in complexity and sophistication as Whitefield has simultaneously grown and matured as an organization. In addition to its collaborative internal processes already described, the school makes use of consultants to provide additional data and insight. For instance, before planned construction projects, architects conduct a space utilization study, which is crucial in aiding the school with the campus master plan. Bracher shares, “One building we had previously shown on our master plan would not be needed with good planning for the current building.” Further, a contract project manager conducted a comprehensive facilities audit to assist the school in planning and budgeting proactively for cyclical and upcoming maintenance needs, rather than having to respond reactively.

Approximately one quarter of SAIS schools do not have an endowment. Though Whitefield does indeed have an endowment, because the school has invested heavily in capital projects in recent years, it has not yet been able to significantly grow its endowment. Whitefield is increasing efforts to grow its endowment by cultivating relationships with alumni and grandparents and launching a planned giving educational program.





## Maintenance as Mission

For Whitefield leadership, the key to a successful planning process is to keep the big picture in mind and to seek counsel in planning. The team strives to be collaborative and listen carefully to others in all of its planning.

“I can’t stress enough how important it is to be clear on mission and to filter each and every decision through it,” shares Bracher. “We constantly communicate that mission and refer to it in ways that enable the faculty, staff, and community to understand it and further it. That might not seem critical to such things as the seemingly mundane work of maintenance, but even with maintenance, there are opportunities to show and say how we are fulfilling our mission in how we maintain and steward the resources God has provided.”

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## Related Resources

- [Financial Resilience for Independent Schools: What to Watch and How to Measure](#)
- [Financial Sustainability Now: Building a Resilient and Mission-Aligned Model \(On-Demand Webinar Available Now\)](#)



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