St. Paul Academy and Summit School

ATHLETICS STRATEGIC PLAN

THE SPARTAN WAY: A CATALYST FOR GREATNESS

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Executive Summary

St. Paul Academy and Summit School has long been an outstanding educational environment, known for its progressive culture and rigorous academic standards. And while SPA has worked to nurture a positive environment for student athletes at all levels — one that has led to numerous high-level and state-wide achievements — there is a great need to enhance the athletics program in order to keep us on par with other top independent schools in the Twin Cities area.

An Athletics Strategic Planning Council began meeting in 2023 to develop an SPA Athletics philosophy, vision, and specific values. In addition, the council recommended a larger strategic planning committee focus on six key areas: student-athlete development, team and program culture, athletics operations, transformational coaching, community support, and facilities development. This Athletics Strategic Plan is a byproduct of that work and outlines actions that will demonstrate SPA's commitment to excellence in the classroom and in the athletics experience for students at all levels.

Photo by Caden Deardurff

External Review and Key Findings

St. Paul Academy and Summit School engaged outside experts to analyze the athletics landscape at other competitive independent schools and provide clarity on SPA's existing strengths and opportunities for growth.

The Athletics Department also conducted internal reviews with both current and past student-athletes, families, and faculty and staff to understand the community's goals for athletics at SPA. All parties agree that it is an opportune time for the SPA Athletics Department to pursue change and growth.

ISACS RECOMMENDATIONS

In the fall of 2019, the ISACS Visiting Team provided key recommendations based on their knowledge of other leading independent schools' athletic programs. They recommend that SPA:

- **Create a philosophy of how sports fit into the school's mission.**
- **Give necessary attention and funding to athletic facilities and sports commensurate to that received by arts and academic programs.**
- **Publicize the school's commitment to excellence in athletics.**

External Review and Key Findings, continued

Photo by Caden Deardurff

SOUTHERN TEACHERS AGENCY

The Southern Teachers Agency completed a detailed analysis of SPA's athletic programs and provided recommendations in three categories.

Immediate needs:

- Develop a strategic plan to guide future decisions and initiatives in athletics.
- Create a vision and a shared culture statement and plan for our Athletics Department.
- Provide equal focus and support for all sports.
- Examine and refine the athletics department structure and operational plan.
- Improve and stabilize coaching performance and continuity.
- Improve communication across the entire program.

Short-term needs:

- Find a transportation system to support travel to and from all contests.
- Formalize connections between these major departments: Athletics, Enrollment, Institutional Advancement, and the Business Office.
- Review the current athletic offerings and their fit for the school.
- Improve and expand Lower School athletics offerings.
- Better connect all divisions to Spartan athletics.

Long-term goals:

- Attend to facility needs and improve the in-game experience.
- Design and implement a college athletics recruiting assistance program.
- Formalize the captain parent and volunteer roles within the program.

The Spartan Way: A Catalyst for Greatness

Armed with purpose and prepared with knowledge from the external analyses, the Athletics Strategic Planning Council defined their specific philosophy, vision, and values, which align with the broader institution's mission.

Above all, the council proposed SPA Athletics live **The Spartan Way: A Catalyst for Greatness.** When we reflect on our philosophy, work toward our vision, and live our values, we can achieve greatness together.

◆ OUR PHILOSOPHY

Athletics contribute to the overall educational experience, where lessons learned in sport are as valuable as those learned in the classroom.

◆ OUR VISION

Spartan Athletics will create transformative experiences for SPA student-athletes. Our program will support them to achieve their personal best in athletics and help all Spartans to make a posititve impact in our community and beyond.

The Spartan Way: A Catalyst for Greatness, continued

OUR VALUES

Athletics-specific values are intricately linked to the school's core values.

SCHOOL'S CORE VALUES	ATHLETICS' CORE VALUES
COMMUNITY	**PRIDE:** Athletes and coaches create a vibrant sense of camaraderie and a team culture that permeates the program and creates a sense of pride for the entire school community.
EXCELLENCE	**EFFORT:** Athletes and coaches work hard to create team success, where student-athletes strive for their personal best while also nurturing a sense of balance in their lives.
BELONGING	**DEVELOPMENT:** Transformational coaches and athletes create a sense of belonging in their teams that allows student-athletes to believe in themselves, take risks, and view setbacks as opportunities to grow.
KINDNESS	**HONOR:** Athletes and teams live by the mantra "we over me" within their teams and in the community, promoting a thoughtful way of living with integrity and kindness.
PURPOSE	**RESPONSIBILITY:** Athletes and teams act with a purpose beyond winning and take responsibility for representing SPA through positive interactions and behavior and good sportsmanship, inspiring others on and off the field.

Our Foundation: Strengths and Accomplishments

This strategic plan is built on a strong foundation of both department strengths and notable accomplishments that, with investment and focus, pave the way for a successful future.

KEY STRENGTHS:

- Highly competent and tremendously positive roster of coaches
- High volume of and support for multi-sport students
- Positive reception of Lower School clinic model
- Visible support and promotion of student athletes

RECENT KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Top 20 for number of Minnesota High School State Championships won

90 athletic teams in 17 sports

2023 Girls Soccer State Champions

2025 Boys Tennis State Champions

2024 Boys Soccer State Champions

Two 2024 Track and Field State Champions

2025 Girls Nordic Sprint Team State Champions

2025 Boys State Alpine Individual Champion

2024 Boys Tennis State Champions

Two 2025 Track and Field Individual State Champions

Photo by Audrey Peltier

Bringing It to Life: Focus Areas

There are six core focus areas for the Athletics Strategic Plan at SPA, each of which has its own associated goals. The Steering Committee will prioritize and implement goals in each area as they make sense financially and operationally.

- Student-Athlete Development
- Operations
- Team and Program Culture
- Transformational Coaching
- Community Support
- Facilities Development

Focus Area: Student-Athlete Development

Create and implement "The SPA Student-Athlete Development System", a progressive approach that prioritizes student-athlete development, well-being, and success, setting SPA apart as a leader among its peers.

GOALS

- **Foster a love of sport that develops leaders and teammates.**
  - Assure regularly scheduled team feedback to all players from coaches and captains.
  - Provide varsity coaches/program directors a system to deliver developmentally-appropriate feedback at all levels.
  - Create realistic short- and long-term goals for each player in partnership with coaches.
  - Establish a system for players to evaluate their experience on the team and progress toward their goals.
- **Create an athletic program for each sport that has intention and a unified structure.**
  - Varsity coaches will articulate a guiding sport principle for the program.
  - Varsity head coaches/program directors coordinate the coaching staff in their sport with a unified program vision across all levels.
  - Provide coaches the tools, structure, and guidance needed to create a program message.
  - Captains at every level work with coaches to model both SPA and athletics values.
- **Create an inclusive atmosphere that mirrors the classroom environment.**
  - Develop a student athlete curriculum that involves holistic training — strength and conditioning, nutrition, and mental wellness.
  - Establish regular coach/athlete conferences — preseason, postseason, and offseason.
  - Provide an environment for intra-SPA coach development/leadership from master coaches and teachers.
  - Pair program heads with SPA faculty mentors for school-day shadowing opportunities.

Photo by Audrey Peltier

Focus Area: Team & Program Culture

Build The Spartan Way by establishing a program environment that is positive, inclusive, and supportive for each team culture and across all athletic programs.

GOALS

- **Provide resources necessary for consistent, clear, and timely communication that helps drive engagement across all sports.**
  - Allocate additional resources (staff support and program funding) to the Athletics Department to improve sports communication.
  - Develop opportunities to highlight all school offerings through summer camps and clinics during the school year.
- **Ensure all program values, student-athlete expectations, and leadership roles (for captains, seniors, and parents) to align with the operating values for athletics and the mission of the school.**
  - Create a "portrait of a student-athlete" to set goals for student-athlete development within teams and across programs.
  - Establish a process for creating a culture in every program in collaboration with the athletics administration, coaches, and team captains/seniors.
- **Create meaningful connections across and within divisions that are consistent for every sport program.**
  - Create a template for how and when Upper School athletes and teams are involved in Lower School and Middle School programming and identify student-athlete leadership opportunities.
  - Commit to parents' role in supporting the program's culture and formalize opportunities to assist in enhancing the experience for all athletes.

Focus Area: Community

Develop and implement a comprehensive action plan to enhance school pride, foster community leadership, and enhance alumni engagement across all programs, with the goal of strengthening support for athletic teams through all potential revenue sources.

GOALS

- **Develop athletics community engagement programming in the St. Paul area.**
- **Encourage, support, and communicate leadership opportunities for all sports and all teams.**
- **Develop revenue models and funding streams that support consistent experiences for all athletic programs.**
- **Create opportunities for the community to support athletics through a parent-driven model (concession stands, Spirit Store, team support, and others) and focus on athletic funding initiatives led by the Institutional Advancement team.**
- **Assist parents in their role to support the student-athlete experience and build the SPA program culture.**

Photo by Caden Deardurff

Photo by Caden Deardurff

Focus Area: Athletics Operations

Establish comprehensive policies, protocols, and plans to enhance the overall experience and success of athletics at SPA.

GOALS

- **Review all policies, including those for transportation, team trips, uniforms, and gear.**
- **Improve communications.**
  - Formally incorporate athletics communications into athletics administration position responsibilties.
  - Introduce new technologies to enhance communications with coaches, student-athletes, and families.
- **Enhance engagement between Athletics and Enrollment.**
  - Establish recruitment and retention goals for program directors/head coaches to evaluate effectiveness of director/coach model.
  - Connect head coaches with Enrollment on a regular basis throughout the admission recruiting cycle.
  - Engage athletics program in student recruiting programs.

Focus Area: Transformational Coaching

Create a plan to attract, develop, and retain exceptional coaching talent, ultimately enhancing the overall success and well-being of student-athletes.

GOALS

- **Develop and implement a head varsity coach/program director model for all programs.**
  - Integrate coaching/athletics systems between divisions, including providing support/professional mentoring and development for all level coaches.
  - Include program directors in retaining lower-level coaches.
  - Develop an evaluation and feedback system for all coaches.
  - Develop a higher-level compensation package for program directors.

Focus Area: Facilities

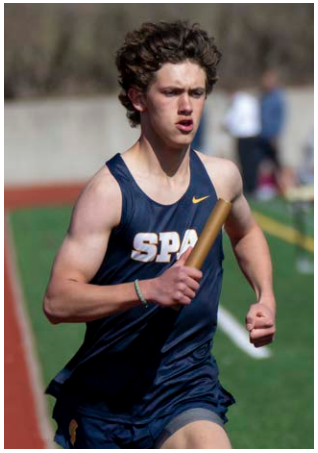
Create modern and functional athletic facilities that support the growth and success of student-athletes and the entire SPA community.

GOALS

- **Build a road map for athletics facilities.**
  - Create a master plan for SPA Athletics.
  - Update existing elements of Drake Arena to improve efficiency and operation while allowing for future renovation and enhancement.
  - Enhance existing athletics student spaces (weight room, locker rooms, after-school spaces for study, fueling, gathering).
  - Develop position description for part-time athletics staff member to oversee students after school (monitor locker rooms, equipment, weight room, etc.).
  - Conduct analysis of current indoor and outdoor signage to improve branding and wayfinding school-wide.
- **Engage the community around the strategic vision for SPA athletics facilities and determine community readiness for a capital campaign through a feasibility study.**
- **Based on the results of the feasibility study, plan a capital campaign for athletics facilities that fosters pride and purpose for the SPA community around Spartan Athletics.**

Photo by Audrey Peltier

THE SPARTAN WAY BEGINS



SPA St. Paul Academy and Summit School