

A Program-Driven Campaign for a Unified Campus

Any great school is known by the impact of its program, which requires extraordinary teachers, curious students, a strong curriculum, and spaces that support learning. Hamlin has always attracted curious, passionate girls and extraordinary adults who inspire them every day. We currently boast a well-rounded, thoughtful curriculum designed to educate girls to meet the challenges of their time, but its development demanded visionary leadership and radical change. Now, we seek to transform Hamlin's physical spaces in a way that is motivated and driven by our innovative pedagogy and educational philosophy.

The process that led to the creation of our current curriculum placemat was exciting. We all enjoyed collaborating. The curriculum, ultimately, was significantly strengthened as thoughtful changes resulted from our having taken a close look at subject areas across grade levels.

-Jane Hillegas-Stommel
Grade 4 Teacher
20 Years at Hamlin

The Evolution of the Hamlin Curriculum

When Wanda M. Holland Greene arrived as Hamlin's eleventh head of school in 2008, an opportunity arose to reimagine the program to meet the needs of today's young women and provide them with the necessary tools to address the challenges of our twenty-first century world. Wanda recognized that not having such a program would quickly become a liability, so she set out to transform it.

Wanda asked every teacher to transcribe their current classroom curriculum and to explain why they teach the way they do. Is an art project just an art project? Why does an assignment happen at a particular time? Teachers from each subject then reviewed the progression of study from Kindergarten through Grade 8 in order to outline and assess requirements of girls at each grade level.

Through this work, we began to discover areas of success and areas for improvement, along with areas of immense untapped potential. As a result, more creativity, collaboration, and right-brain thinking began to emerge as key components of Hamlin's curriculum and overall educational philosophy.

Making Cross-Curricular Connections

The documentation exercise began to change the way teachers thought about the program: How much homework should be assigned? What kinds of tests should be given? Teaching methods and student learning began to pivot to reflect twenty-first century capacities: creativity, collaboration, and communication.

Upon completion of the project, we discovered evidence of a traditional and siloed way of teaching. But a rapidly changing world demands more: a relevant, agile, and complementary curriculum. Hamlin's program, after all, was never meant to have an impermeable boundary. Since our inception, Sarah Dix Hamlin intended flexibility in order to prepare girls for life beyond school walls and to meet the challenges of their time. This moral imperative proved to be the key motivator for innovation and change.

Developing a Signature Interdisciplinary Curriculum

In order to facilitate this creative curricular pivot, Wanda gathered teachers into cross-curricular design groups and gave them a task: using San Francisco as a 'classroom,' create one unit of study to which each teacher could contribute elements of their respective discipline. From these groups a tremendous interdisciplinary spirit among faculty was born, along with a stronger desire to leave the school grounds and use San Francisco as an exploratory learning space for students. The results of this collaboration can be seen every day at Hamlin. You might find a music teacher and science teacher teaming up to teach a "physics of sound" unit, or you may walk by the movement lab and find a math teacher helping girls dance linear equations to remember the order of operations.



Using dance to promote retention of math skills is one way the new program promotes learning by embodying the physical representation of abstract ideas. The connection between movement and activity has been proven to enhance learning in any setting and, as a result, Hamlin has placed an increased emphasis on health and wellness to enhance girls' learning. Hamlin girls are active and jubilant in their learning when given the space to accommodate such energetic curiosity.

Today, we enjoy an extraordinary ethos of interdisciplinary learning and cross-fertilization between and among areas of study. Hamlin now has a culture with a very clear curriculum and thoughtful design behind what happens at school each day. We strongly reflect Sarah Dix Hamlin's belief that "the mere knowledge of facts will be insufficient" for Hamlin girls.

Aligning the Program and Environment

While we are proud of the remarkable work we do at Hamlin each day, our physical spaces do not reflect the significant pedagogical shifts that have been made. Such dynamic cross- and inter-curricular learning currently takes place in a disjointed campus setting that was pieced together over the years and largely built for students in the last century. This misalignment, if not corrected, is poised to become a liability. Simply boasting of a program that is more connected and more directionally appropriate is not enough when physical spaces restrict the learning potential of students.



Despite our renewed focus on health and wellness and impressive athletics program, for example, Hamlin girls are forced to slow down because their gym is too small. While theater teacher Heidi Abbott and Middle School students produce impressive theater performances, the audience strains to see them sing from folding chairs at the back of the gymnasium floor.

We envision a modern, joyful campus where the creativity and success of our girls is limitless; where inadequate spaces no longer negatively impact the potential of our students. Hamlin will always be at the forefront of innovation and technology, and our school building must stand up to these advances. In our reimagined campus, girls will own the space in a whole new way and benefit from an alignment between our pedagogy and our

space. Newly designed Lower School classrooms will become "third teachers" in encouraging girls to stretch their minds and bodies every day; the physical facility will be able to "speak" without a teacher, student, or administrator having to provide the voice. A visitor will walk into the building on a silent Saturday morning and know exactly who we are and what we care about.

While we have not yet broken ground on our campus transformation, there is already much to celebrate. Thanks to the generosity of the Hamlin community – parents, alumnae, and past parents – we have significantly increased salaries of our faculty to affirm the transformational work they do. This critical adjustment brought the salaries of Hamlin faculty among the upper quartile of our peer schools and enables us as a school to remain competitive in hiring and retaining top faculty from around the country.

Hamlin's audacious vision calls for a once in a lifetime physical transformation of McKinne (our Lower School building), the addition of an outdoor science teaching terrace, and the unification of our three-building campus. This is the campaign that will make the key difference to Hamlin girls for generations to come. We have an opportunity to harness our community's collective energies and resources to build Hamlin girls a facility that supports the work they are already doing and provides them with the platform they need for limitless innovation and change.

A space that allows for growth, differentiation, and active evidence of learning is a necessity for progress. Our learning is no longer flat; it's tall and broad. Right now, our physical space feels like we're planting a redwood tree in a box and expecting it to acclimate to the box. We need a garden, a forest even, so that our girls can see their learning as limitless both figuratively and literally.

-Nisa Frank
Lower School Division Head