

June 19, 2024

SCARSDALE FORUM INC.

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Report of the Education Committee

On

The Scarsdale School District “Profile of an SHS Graduate” Initiative

The Education Committee of Scarsdale Forum Inc. (the “Committee” and the
“Forum” respectively) proposes the following Resolution for adoption by the Forum:

RESOLVED, that the Report of the Education Committee on evaluation of The
Scarsdale School District “Profile of an SHS Graduate” Initiative be approved.

I. INTRODUCTION	3
II. BACKGROUND	6
<i>A. Overview of the Profile Initiative</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>B. The Committee's Engagement with the District Regarding the Profile Initiative</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>C. The Committee's Research, Deliberations and Discussions with Experts</i>	<i>11</i>
III. STRENGTHS OF THE PROFILE INITIATIVE	15
<i>A. Traditional academic metrics are becoming less effective at achieving the goal of admission to top-tier institutions of higher education</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>B. Attributes and skills are becoming more important to achieving the goal of admission to top-tier institutions of higher education</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>C. Traditional academic metrics are limited in their ability to measure a broad range of skills and prepare students for a technologically evolving society</i>	<i>21</i>
IV. CHALLENGES WITH THE PROFILE INITIATIVE	26
<i>A. The Profile Initiative suffers from definitional ambiguity and overbreadth</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>B. Some elements of the Profile Initiative may be beyond the ability of any school district to bring about in an educational setting</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>C. By setting forth an ideal vision of a Scarsdale High School graduate, the Profile Initiative may fail to guide students in making the tradeoffs which are necessary for implementation of the portrait in daily life</i>	<i>30</i>
V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROFILE INITIATIVE	33
<i>A. Recommendation #1: Adopt the NYS Portrait as Much as Possible</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>B. Recommendation #2: Clearly Integrating the Profile Initiative and the Strategic Plan</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>C. Recommendation #3: Engage with Students About Balancing</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>D. Recommendation #4: Broadening the Senior Options Program</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>E. Recommendation #5: Incorporate More Individualized, Project-Based Learning Into the Curriculum</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>F. Recommendation #6: Consider Pedagogical and Curricular Reforms Based On Emerging Research and Technological Change</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>G. Recommendation #7: Leverage Scarsdale's Vast Alumni Network and Regional Proximity to Institutions of Higher Education</i>	<i>38</i>
VI. CONCLUSION: DEEPENING TIES BETWEEN THE DISTRICT AND SCARSDALE FORUM	39

I. INTRODUCTION

During the academic year 2022-23, the administration of the Scarsdale Union Free School District (the “District”) developed a “Profile of an SHS Graduate” (the “Profile Initiative”), identifying a series of goals for Scarsdale High School (“SHS”) graduates to achieve as they move through the school system in Scarsdale and beyond. The Profile Initiative is similar to other initiatives at the statewide and school district levels. A “portrait-of-a-graduate” framework was recently proposed to New York State’s Board of Regents. The attributes articulated in the Profile Initiative in Scarsdale encompass five primary areas: critical thinker, skillful practitioner, lifelong learner, compassionate leader, and non-SIBI community member.¹ The Profile Initiative was originally put forward in the context of Advanced Topics courses. But the scope of the Profile Initiative is far broader. It raises profound, far-reaching questions in the District regarding the balance between content learning and skills development, and between academic and non-academic goals.

The focus of this report by the Scarsdale Forum’s Education Committee and its membership (the “Committee” or “we”) developed out of a Fall, 2022 meeting with Dr. Andrew (Drew) Patrick, Scarsdale School District Superintendent. During this meeting, the Committee asked the administration to define topics of interest for study. Dr. Patrick believed the Committee’s perspective on the Profile Initiative would be most valuable. In the following year, the Committee met regularly, conducted extensive research, and

¹ “Non-Sibi” is the motto for the Scarsdale schools, meaning “not for oneself.”

engaged with outside experts to develop recommendations on the Profile Initiative which are detailed in this Report.

In the view of the Committee, the District should be commended for the Profile Initiative for several reasons. Traditional academic metrics, such as letter grades and standardized tests, are limited in their ability to measure a broad range of skills and to prepare students for a technologically evolving, diverse, and globalized society. While the requirement of SATs and ACTs has been reinstated for a number of highly selective institutions such as MIT, Dartmouth, and Yale, many continue to offer an opt-out option on their applications. There is considerable evidence—both anecdotally within Scarsdale and more generally in the literature—that excessively prioritizing traditional academic metrics has a negative effect on students’ mental health and wellness.

That said, the Committee has identified certain challenges to be addressed with respect to the Profile Initiative, all of which will be discussed in depth in the following pages. These critiques are not meant to undermine the Profile Initiative, but rather to offer a fresh perspective and insight on how to strengthen its vision. One concern the Committee has is that the Profile Initiative may suffer from definitional ambiguity and overbreadth. The concepts in the Profile Initiative seem to lack well-defined metrics for success. And the Committee believes that if the District suggests an ideal vision of a SHS graduate, the District might find it challenging to guide students in making the tradeoffs which are necessary for implementation of the Profile Initiative in daily life. Setting forth an ideal vision might also cut against the District’s and community’s goals in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The Committee recommends that when implementing the Profile Initiative, the District employ concrete definitions with measurable criteria, focusing on empowering graduates with real-world skills and experience. We identify several concrete suggestions that the District could implement in the coming years. The first is to broaden the Senior Options program to summer, quarter, and year-long internships. Other high schools have longer programs that are more deeply integrated into the student curriculum. A second suggestion is to incorporate more individualized, project-based learning into the curriculum. Group-based instruction and assessment can only go so far toward enhancing and evaluating the capabilities, talents, and work ethic of individual students. A third is to consider pedagogical and curricular reforms based on emerging research and technological change.

When the structure of the Profile Initiative becomes more formalized, the District might consider developing evaluative criteria that could be used to assess the Profile Initiative's capacity to accomplish goals and objectives. Such evaluative criteria might need to be applied longitudinally over a number of years. This might prove a daunting task, but the Profile Initiative is designed to impact a lifetime of experiences. Technological changes are coming fast and furious, so the conceptual framework and tactical applications underpinning the Profile Initiative should be malleable enough to allow for such changes.

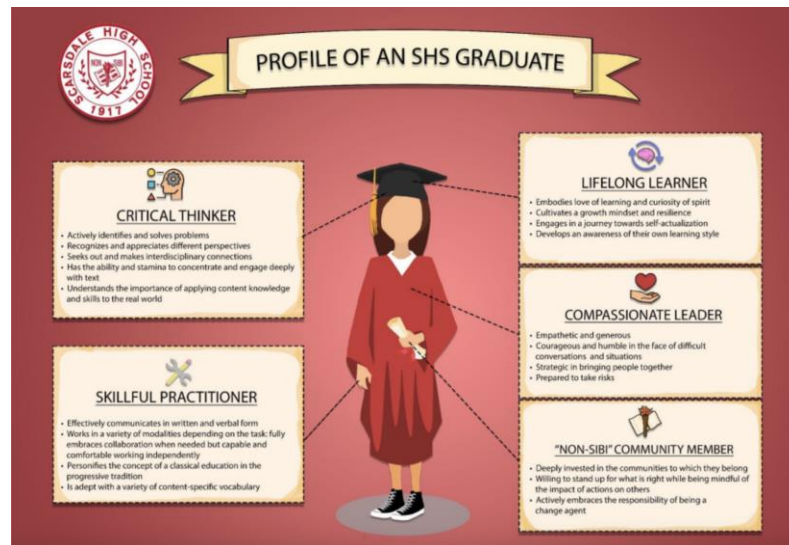
The Committee recommends that the District consider the Profile Initiative's impact on the budget and actively reach out to the community regarding such impact. The Committee also encourages the District to communicate and collaborate with other high-performing school districts that are in various stages of implementing initiatives similar to

the Profile Initiative. Consultation with recognized education thought leaders (those recognized as authorities in education and are able to share their expertise and insights on critical issues and organizations) should also be considered. Finally, the Committee invites the District to work with the Forum to deepen its engagement with alumni and other stakeholders in the community who may not be actively engaged with existing institutions like the Parent-Teacher Council or whose children are no longer attending Scarsdale schools. The Forum's membership roster and community stature could be brought to bear to help Scarsdale students acquire real-world skills and experience in a variety of concrete ways.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Overview of the Profile Initiative

During the course of the 2022-23 school year, the District developed a "Profile of an SHS Graduate" framework, which was presented at meetings of the Board of Education with the following slide:



As presented on this slide, the Profile Initiative includes five components:

Component #1: Critical Thinker. This component identifies the following goals: (1) actively identifies and solves problems; (2) recognizes and appreciates different perspectives; (3) seeks out and makes interdisciplinary connections; (4) has the ability and stamina to concentrate and engage deeply with text; and (5) understands the importance of applying content knowledge and skills to the real world.

Component #2: Skillful Practitioner. This component identifies the following goals: (1) effectively communicates in written and verbal form; (2) works in a variety of modalities depending on the task: fully embracing collaboration when needed but capable and comfortable working independently; (3) personifies the concept of a classical education in the progressive tradition; and (4) is adept with a variety of content-specific vocabulary.

Component #3: Lifelong Learner. This component identifies the following goals: (1) embodies a love of learning and curiosity of spirit; (2) cultivates a growth mindset and resilience; (3) engages in a journey towards self-actualization; and (4) develops an awareness of their own learning style.

Component #4: Compassionate Leader. This component identifies the following goals: (1) empathetic and generous; (2) courageous and humble in the face of difficult conversations and situations; (3) strategic in bringing people together; and (4) prepared to take risks.

Component #5: “Non-SIBI” Community Member. This component identifies the following goals: (1) deeply invested in the communities to which they belong; (2) willing to stand up for what is right while being mindful of the impact of actions on others; and (3) actively embraces the responsibility of being a change agent.

The history of the Profile Initiative in Scarsdale is not clear from the public record. The first appearance seems to have been in a presentation on the Education Report at the December 19, 2022, meeting of the Board of Education.² This slide summarizing the Profile Initiative was presented again on May 22, 2023, where it was featured more

² See, e.g., Wendy Macmillan, WIDE Produces Students Who Are Good At Learning And Good At Life, Scarsdale 10583, <https://scarsdale10583.com/section-table/103-school-news/9994-wide-produces-students-good-who-are-good-at-learning-and-good-at-life> (“Also of note, when students were asked to create a profile of an SHS graduate, the first attributes outlined are being a critical thinker, a skillful practitioner, a lifelong learner, a compassionate leader, and a “Non-Sibi” community member.”); Board of Education, December 19, 2022, Education Report Presentation, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ltPu4LemaKsRc5wdLU6LcwGimCgUeRH/view> .

prominently in a discussion concerning Advanced Topics (AT) courses.³ The slide also appeared for community consumption at a series of World Café Dialog meetings that occurred in the fall of 2023, as a component of the District’s strategic plan development.

Based on the Committee’s review of publicly available materials, the Profile Initiative has not yet received systematic analysis or engagement with the broader community apart from these brief presentations and interviews with the media.

B. The Committee’s Engagement with the District Regarding the Profile Initiative

On November 29, 2022, Dr. Andrew Patrick, Superintendent of the Scarsdale School District, met with Barry Meiselman, Chair of the Committee, at District offices to discuss the committee’s “Report of the Education Committee on Establishing New Strategies for Promoting Well-Being and Addressing Mental Health Issues Within Scarsdale’s Schools.” (see Exhibit A)

At the end of the meeting, Mr. Meiselman asked Dr. Patrick for topics for the Committee to opine on that might be of particular interest to the District and the community. The primary topic discussed was the District’s Profile Initiative. The vision behind the Profile Initiative was described as representing the District’s best efforts to foster student success in life by developing “power skills” as “Critical Thinkers, Skillful

³ See, e.g., Wendy Macmillan, As College Admissions Grow Even More Challenging, District Affirms Support For AT Program, May 24, 2023, Scarsdale 10583, <https://scarsdale10583.com/schools/10271-as-college-admissions-grow-even-more-challenging-district-examines-at-program>

Practitioners, Lifelong Learners, Compassionate Leaders and “Non-Sibi” Community Members.”⁴

The Committee met to discuss the District’s desire to have the Forum collaborate as a community partner in the Profile Initiative’s development. The Committee’s interest in and experience with its tenets and profound interest in the Profile Initiative led to its selection as a top priority project and the subject of this Report.

A general definition with respect to a “profile-of-a-graduate” initiative is provided by Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC), and is aligned with the District’s vision: “Profile, or ‘A Portrait of a Graduate,’ is a school or district’s collective vision for student success...this vision describes the skills and competencies that a community agrees its young people need to thrive in learning, work, and life.”⁵

The next collaborative meeting to discuss the Profile Initiative was held on April 19, 2023, with District cabinet members, educators, and the Committee. During the meeting, SHS Principal Kenneth Bonamo presented the District’s vision of the Profile Initiative, past and current work, a draft Profile model and future steps.

⁴ Scarsdale Board of Education Meeting held on December 19, 2022, discussion of “Profile of an SHS Graduate” at 1:07:28 and 1:46:08, <https://vimeopro.com/scarsdaleschoolstv/boe-2022-2023/video/783045391>

⁵ Exploring Portrait of a Graduate in Practice Across the U.S. How Students Develop the Skills and Competencies in a Portrait of a Graduate.” <https://www.nextgenlearning.org/portrait-of-a-graduate-in-practice>

C. The Committee's Research, Deliberations, and Discussions with Experts

The Committee leveraged the experience and connections of its members to engage with Maggie Favretti, a retired 25-year teacher in the District, a published thought leader in education, and member of the Committee. Ms. Favretti provided names of particular education thought leaders around the country to provide insight on their own projects similar to the Profile Initiative and other transformation projects in other school districts. The Committee conducted Zoom meetings and phone calls in June 2023 with the following leaders in reimagining education:

- **Tom Vander Ark**, CEO of Getting Smart, <https://www.gettingsmart.com/team/tom-vander-ark/>
- **Ted Dintersmith**, Education Author, <https://teddintersmith.com/>
- **Kaleb Rashad**, Co-Founder & Creative Director at the Center for Love & Justice, High Tech High Graduate School of Education, <https://www.hightechhigh.org/staff/kaleb-rashad/>
- **Pam Moran**, SocolMoran Partners, LLC, Executive Director, Virginia School Consortium for Learning, <https://www.socolmoran.com/>

Tom Vander Ark and his colleagues at Getting Smart suggested that the District focus on valued learning goals and experiences; focus on strengthening the Senior Options program at the High School; lean into the opportunities offered by Artificial Intelligence (AI) along with other smart tools to develop new skill sets for students; establish more spaces for students to engage in community work; and above all, involve students in the discussion.

Ted Dintersmith found deeper learning to take place in after school activities and suggested taking advantage of artificial intelligence (“AI”) to develop new learning

standards; doing a capstone project at the end of junior year of high school so it could be continued during the senior year; setting big goals to get the community excited about the Profile Initiative and encouraging projects that make a difference; in April-May of each year, holding a public exhibition of student and educator accomplishments; and from kindergarten on, students should be carrying out an initiative.

Kaleb Rashad and staff at High Tech High called for co-designing learning ecosystems with the community; begin with students' lived experiences and allow them to engage in questions that are important to young people; have students work together to design projects and then bring parents into the experiences; and noted that the "change management" piece will be crucial (i.e., managing expectations around the process of change itself).

Pam Moran stressed that the Profile Initiative should become the District's guiding north star; there is a need for more public-facing opportunities between school districts and communities to better inform stakeholders about learning activities and the Profile Initiative; and there is still a need to build assessment models to determine whether similar initiatives developed in other school districts are accomplishing their goals and objectives.

Barry Meiselman also attended a Town Hall webinar on June 22, 2023, "Portrait of a Graduate in Practice," sponsored by Getting Smart.⁶ The discussion centered around the experiences of two school districts implementing their own initiatives similar to the Profile Initiative and their attempts to answer a key question "How might we redesign teaching

⁶ <https://www.gettingsmart.com/podcast/town-hall-recap-portrait-of-a-graduate-in-practice/#>

and learning to ensure all students have high-quality learning experiences that help them continuously develop the competencies in our Portrait of a Graduate?” Both districts showed infographics of their Portrait models and spoke about student experiences as they relate to their Portrait initiative. They are in the process of developing ways to evaluate whether their Portraits are achieving desired goals and objectives.

On July 27, 2023, the Committee shared a draft outline of this Report with the District for comments and reactions. On November 14, 2023, the District sent a series of comments and responses to that draft outline. This full-length report incorporates and responds to those comments (which are at times presented without quotation marks or attribution) and welcomes further engagement by the District with the discussion in this report.

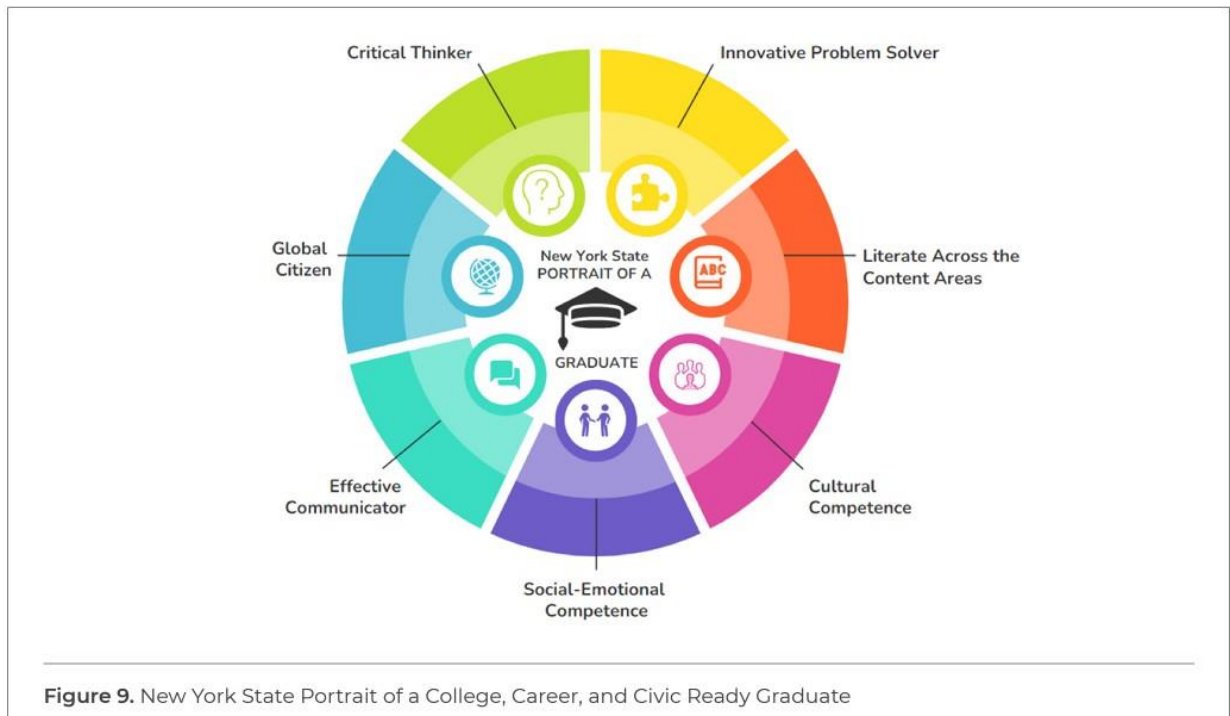
The New York State Education Department issued a Report dated November 13, 2023 (the “Blue Ribbon Report”), on recommendations by a Blue-Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures (the “Commission”) created in 2019 by the New York State Board of Regents.⁷ The Blue-Ribbon Report included the Commission’s recommendations for “the NYS Portrait of a Graduate.” The Commission determined that the attributes to include in the “NYS Portrait of a Graduate” that the Commission recommended to the Board of Regents are:

- i. Critical Thinker;
- ii. Innovative Problem Solver;

⁷ New York State Education Department, “Blue Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures,” November 13, 2023.

- iii. Literate Across the Content Areas;
- iv. Cultural Competence;
- v. Social-Emotional Competence;
- vi. Effective Communicator; and
- vii. Global Citizen.⁸

The diagram reflecting the proposed NYS Portrait of a Graduate that was included in the November Report is below:



⁸ Blue Ribbon Report at p. 27.

III. STRENGTHS OF THE PROFILE INITIATIVE

In the Committee's view, the District's Profile Initiative has a number of strengths, revolving around more of a balance between content learning and skills development.

A. Traditional academic metrics are becoming less effective at achieving the goal of admission to top-tier institutions of higher education.

A new focus on skills development and character development should prove helpful in preparing students for a society that is increasingly diverse and technologically evolving. It appears that initiatives around the country in recent years to develop "portrait-of-a-graduate" models, including in Scarsdale, are driven in part by a growing appreciation of the importance of skills and character development as opposed to solely content knowledge. As New York State Commissioner of Education Betty Rosa recently explained in an interview with respect to the Commission's proposed NYS Portrait of a Graduate, "Upon graduation, we want to make sure that students have a set of attributes, skills, that they possess in getting them ready for college, career, and civic engagement. Once we have [students] in our space, we want them to build these skills of cooperating and collaborating. We want them to become communicators...We want them to be ethical and global citizens." Commissioner Rosa said that the proposal of the NYS Portrait of a Graduate followed engagement with superintendents, principals, teachers' unions, the New York State Labor Department, parents, community organizations and students.

Among the reasons why increased emphasis on skills development is prudent is the impact of technology on education. There is a widespread recognition that technological

innovation is likely to transform education over the coming years and decades. One area of focus is the large language models like ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence tools. A growing set of literature calls into question the value and relevancy of traditional methods of pedagogy in an AI era. For example, in an article on the future of education published in the peer-reviewed journal *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Bill Cope, Mary Kalantzis and Duane Sears Smith at the University of Illinois College of Education write:

In AI-enabled education where learners have the benefit of endless accessibility to nameable knowledge, learning becomes a matter of schema framing, model making, evidence seeking, and ontology validation. Navigating the oceans of knowledge requires critical discernment and disciplinary judgment. Assembling knowledge requires a collaborative mnemonics, with machine support in the form of cognitive prostheses (lookup ability, note taking, topic modeling, diagramming, referencing sources, procedural calculation, and reality checking), and not biological memory alone. With the ubiquitous availability of artificial intelligence for name lookup of disciplinary concepts and empirical instances, the processes and desired outcomes of learning change profoundly. “Closed book” exams become anachronistic.⁹

These authors identify a series of areas where AI is likely to transform education: naming, calculating, measuring, and representing. Moreover, they contrast traditional learning and assessment with assessment for learning with AI. Rather than summarizing their detailed comparison, please reference their table in its entirety:

⁹ Bill Cope, Mary Kalantzis & Duane Sears Smith, *Artificial intelligence for education: Knowledge and its assessment in AI-enabled learning ecologies*, Ed. Phil. & Theory (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1728732>

<i>Traditional learning and assessment (including first-generation e-learning systems)</i>	<i>Assessment for learning with artificial intelligence</i>
<i>Peculiar artifacts at distinct times:</i> select response and supply response tests. Even when they are more frequent (e.g. quizzes after a video lecture or the end of the chapter in an e-textbook), such tests remain summative in their genre and orientation.	<i>Embedded formative assessment:</i> measurement of learning that offers incremental, semantically legible, machine feedback and machine-mediated human feedback.
<i>Narrow data range:</i> sample: n = small, just the exams. Data types: few (mostly test items or statistical language processing of supplied text).	<i>Wide range:</i> sample: n = all, traces of all recordable learning. Data types: can be many.
<i>Linear knowledge measurement processes:</i> study content > end content access > take test > pass test > go on to new content.	<i>Recursive feedback:</i> all feedback is actionable, e.g. improvement suggestions to revise work.
<i>Retrospective and judgmental feedback:</i> global judgments, at the end of a period of learning, summatively expressed in scores or grades.	<i>Prospective and constructive feedback:</i> assessment contributes to learning by providing formative feedback. Summative perspectives offer progress visualizations of data that were always in the first instance formative.
<i>Cognitive orientation:</i> measuring long term memory in closed book, proctored examinations.	<i>Ergative orientation:</i> work-focused measurement, assembling knowledge from carefully discerned sources, assessing multimodal knowledge artifacts as product and process.
<i>Narrow epistemic range:</i> factual recall and correct deductions from procedure. The artifact of the test orients learning towards atomized, and decontextualized view of knowledge.	<i>Complex epistemic performance:</i> assessing the holistic knowledge practices and deep disciplinary thinking that underpins the work of making of authentic knowledge artifacts; focus on higher order creative, critical, or design thinking.
<i>A gaming and gamable system:</i> guessing the right answer from distractor items (navigating the test as a system of trickery) in a select response test is not a necessarily matter understanding the thinking behind a problem. (The right thinking might land a test-taker on the distractor item or the wrong thinking on the correct answer). Supply response tests with one, overworked reader or machine reading are more open to plagiarism.	<i>System transparency:</i> high visibility of work and the presence of many eyes and perspectives including anonymous peers is a disincentive to cheating. Proctoring is un-necessary when the substitute for the cheater has to be present for the whole course because all course activity is being measured.
<i>Individualized intelligence:</i> knowledge is in its nature social, but by focusing on mnemonics, traditional tests make it seem individual, as if what I answer in a test is "my" knowledge.	<i>Collaborative intelligence:</i> knowledge has a social provenance (discovery via lookup and acknowledgement of sources); it is integrated through disciplinary thinking; and it is contextually-grounded. Cognitive prostheses replace individualized mnemonics. Peer-to-peer social learning is traced through explicit recognition and tracking.
<i>Individualized learning:</i> a hub-and-spoke, transmission model, not requiring community interaction: e.g. video lectures, e-text content, "personalized" learning etc., measured with traditional assessments.	<i>Communities of learners:</i> managing and measuring many complex interactions in a social knowledge environment: e.g. online comment threads, peer review, peer annotation etc.
<i>Didactic pedagogy:</i> transmission of empirical knowledge and correct application of disciplinary concepts, as required by assessments.	<i>Reflexive pedagogy:</i> the measure of learning is in its incremental making, and recorded interactions with resources, peers, with the computer as a cognitive prosthesis.
<i>Insisting on inequality:</i> even when students enter a course on the presupposition that all can succeed, they are normed against a standard; this imposes an institutional insistence that outcomes must be unequal.	<i>Mastery learning:</i> with incremental feedback, customizable learning pathways, and progress data always accessible for learners and teachers. Every learner can achieve course performance outcomes or mastery learning (Bloom, 1968), albeit at their own pace, possibly via different routes, and with persistence.
<i>Standardizing minds:</i> correct answers, norm-referenced measurement.	<i>Productive diversity:</i> when the focus disciplinary practice and social learning, differences in life experience, perspective and thinking become visible, measurable, and valuable for learning in a context of epistemic collaboration.

While a comprehensive analysis of each of these transformations is beyond the scope of this Report, it is readily apparent that they may render traditional methods of

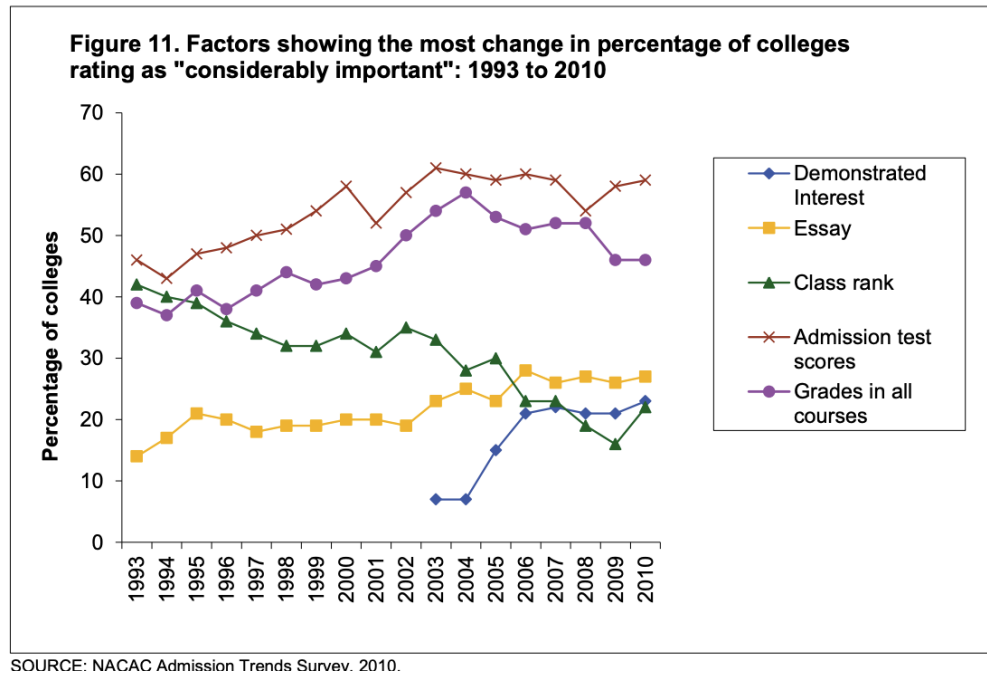
education and assessment—and thus the quantitative metrics associated with traditional assessments—obsolete. To take a simple example, consider course grades, which are often predicated on a “narrow data range” of answers to tests and quizzes or short essays and reports. In an AI era, learning will be based on a “wide data range” of information, i.e., all human knowledge on a given topic.

A further illustration is the difference between individualized learning and collaborative intelligence. Technological evolution, including generative AI, is likely to increase the importance of group-based learning, including the synthesis of knowledge from multiple sources. One particularly compelling example of knowledge synthesis is large language models (LLMs), which synthesize knowledge across a wide range of domains at a highly sophisticated level and can effectively replicate certain aspects of human communication. With these sorts of tools readily available for students in the coming decades, individualized knowledge should be complemented by an ability to derive novel insights from information that has been synthesized through generative AI at a societal level.

B. Attributes and skills are becoming more important to achieving the goal of admission to top-tier institutions of higher education.

The District Profile Initiative, while not framed as focusing on college admissions, should prove to move the District in a helpful direction in terms of college admissions in an environment quite different than what adults in the Scarsdale community experienced.

In recent years, colleges have been giving increased weight to individualized factors like an applicant's life story, unique experiences, and attributes.



The most recent NCAC report, released for the fall 2023 admissions cycle, found that only 4.9% of colleges viewed test scores as considerably important—an unsurprising result in light of the decreasing popularity of test scores described previously. But the decline was not only limited to test scores: for the fall 2023 admissions cycle, 76.8% of colleges considered high school grades in college prep courses to be important—a decline of 8% (in relative terms) from the 2010 figure of 83.4%.¹⁰ Similarly, only 5.5% of colleges considered class rank to be considerably important—a decline of 75% (in relative terms) from the 2010 figure of 21.8%. The fraction of schools viewing subject test scores (AP, IB)

¹⁰ NACAC, National Association for College Admissions Counseling, <https://www.nacacnet.org/factors-in-the-admission-decision/>

as considerably important also declined to 1.1%, a drop of 89% (in relative terms) from the 2010 figure of 9.6%. The fall 2023 table is reproduced below:

	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
<i>High school grades in college prep courses</i>	185	76.8	15.1	4.9	3.2
Total high school grades (all courses)	185	74.1	18.9	5.4	1.6
Strength of high school curriculum	185	63.8	22.7	10.3	3.2
Positive character attributes	184	28.3	37.5	18.5	15.8
Essay or writing sample	185	18.9	37.3	26.5	17.3
Student's interest in attending	185	15.7	27.6	25.4	31.4
Counselor recommendation	185	11.9	40	27.6	20.5
Teacher recommendation	185	10.8	40.5	28.1	20.5
Extracurricular activities	185	6.5	44.3	30.8	18.4
High school class rank	183	5.5	22.4	43.2	29
Admission test scores (ACT, SAT)	185	4.9	25.4	38.9	30.8
Portfolio	185	4.9	10.8	24.3	60
Interview	185	4.3	8.6	32.4	54.6
Work	185	2.2	30.8	40	27
State graduation exam scores	185	1.6	6.5	18.4	73.5
Subject test scores (AP, IB)	185	1.1	22.2	25.9	50.8

To be sure, the decline in the importance of grades in college prep classes since 2010 is modest compared to the decline in the importance of test scores and subject tests (AP, IB). Grades in college prep classes still play a particularly key role. But these trends do reflect a reduced importance for the sort of “hard metrics” that traditionally drove the college admissions process in the past. It is important to note, however, that MIT, Dartmouth, Yale, Brown, Purdue, and UT Austin have joined other colleges in reinstating testing scores (SAT, ACT) as a requirement for admission consideration. Researchers have

found a strong relationship between test scores and college performance, as well as success beyond college. These studies have also shown the ways standardized tests can contribute to diversity.¹¹

C. The District's Profile Initiative, in reducing the emphasis on traditional academic instruction and metrics, may ultimately benefit students' mental health and wellness.

Concerns over the mental health and wellness of high school students in high-achieving school districts and competitive private schools have received increasing attention in recent years, and Scarsdale is no exception. On December 5, 2022, the Committee released a report on “New Strategies for Promoting Well-Being and Addressing Mental Health Issues Within Scarsdale’s Schools.”¹² The report called for the institution of a district-wide approach to well-being as an ongoing philosophy in support of the District’s commitment to restore the joy, confidence, and relevance of learning for all students. The development of a “profile of a graduate” in Scarsdale that reduces emphasis on traditional academic instruction and metrics - while not eliminating such emphasis entirely – should prove beneficial to students from the standpoint of mental health and wellness.

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/07/briefing/the-misguided-war-on-the-sat.html>;
<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/05/briefing/dartmouth-sat.html>;
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/marlenacorcoran/2024/03/12/why-highly-selective-colleges-are-reinstating-the-sat/?sh=7789b6a310f0>; <https://admissions.yale.edu/standardized-testing>;

¹² Scarsdale Forum Education Committee, <https://www.scarsdaleforum.com/Reports/download/1205>

There is substantial anecdotal evidence that a primary driver of stress and mental health challenges is the excessive prioritization of traditional academic metrics like standardized test scores, grades, and class rank. During deliberations that led to the production of this Report, members of the Committee reported anonymous anecdotes of a competitive atmosphere within SHS concerning grades and class rank. One particular anecdote concerned the number of “slots” available to Scarsdale students at a leading Ivy League institution of higher education, with the person noting “Everyone is competing for that one spot for Scarsdale students at XXXX University, so there is no room for error.” Parents reported that students would “check in” with each other on GPA rank and create spreadsheets to help track their “competition.” Similar anecdotal reports were echoed by members of the community in conversations on the topic.

These reports among Scarsdale community members are consistent with media coverage in the mid-2010s of a growing mental health crisis among high school students. In October 2014, *The Atlantic* reported anecdotal evidence of a “surge in anxiety” that arises from the need to achieve quantitative metrics like high grades in college prep courses:

“The competition and pressure on kids have really increased,” Sevier said. “There seems to be a belief that there are certain courses that are the ‘right’ ones to take. Getting the ‘right’ grade in those classes leads to the potential of getting into the ‘right’ college or university. Many of those ‘right’ schools have stiff admission requirements. Students are challenged to take a demanding course of study, to get a high GPA and gain admission into those schools. So many times, if they are

denied, students take it as a personal failure. School is more challenging, the stakes seem to be higher, and pressure is alive and well.”¹³

Emerging academic literature has examined drivers of mental health challenges among high school students. To be sure, these experiences may be subject to bias because they reflect an individual’s own perspective. It is also difficult to disentangle causation and correlation. For example, pressure from family members could cause certain students to experience stress as well as study hard, and thereby obtain higher grades. That sort of pressure would lead to a correlation between academic metrics and stress without one necessarily causing the other. Compelling evidence of a negative effect on mental health of excessively pursuing academic metrics is likely to arise from case studies, surveys and interviews with students who report their subjective experiences.

The academic literature on this topic is vast. One study of particular note is a 2015 study published in *Frontiers of Psychology* by faculty at NYU, Columbia, the National Development and Research Institutes and the Spence School. During the study they conducted qualitative interviews with students and faculty at a number of competitive private schools and a survey and panel discussions among 128 students in eleventh grade at two of those schools.¹⁴ Nearly half of students reported a “great deal of stress on a daily basis,” with females much more stressed than males: 60% vs. 41%. In interviews, many

¹³ Lucy Dwyer, *When Anxiety Hits At School*, THE ATLANTIC, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/10/when-anxiety-hits-at-school/380622/>

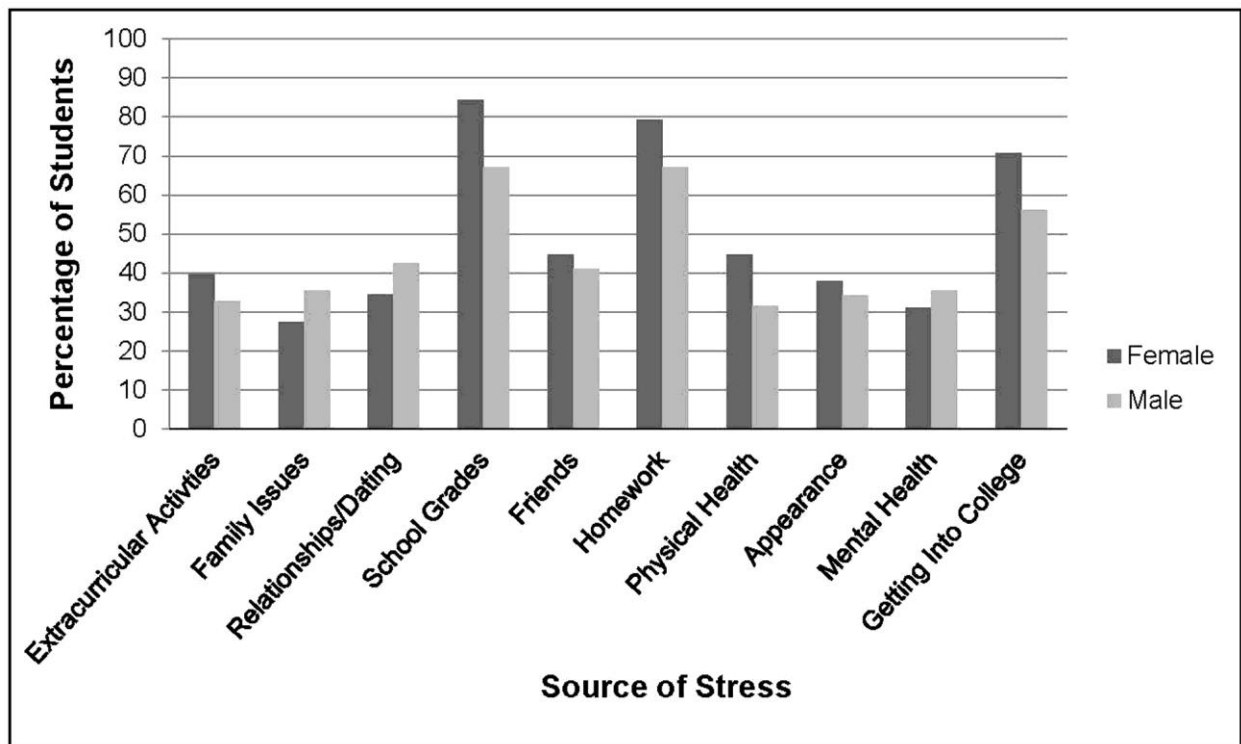
¹⁴ Noelle R. Leonard et al, A multi-method exploratory study of stress, coping, and substance use among high school youth in private schools, *Frontiers in Psychology*, Jul. 23, 2015.

pointed to unrealistic parental expectations based on an erroneous assumption that “their children will achieve high grades as long as they put in the time and effort”:

A number of students expressed the views that their parents had unrealistic expectations of their abilities to consistently perform at a high level and did not recognize the strenuous efforts they were making to try and live up to these expectations. One male student noted: **“I can work really hard and not always get awesome grades and that’s kinda been hard for them to understand... I have to tell them that like, you know, this class, I’m working really hard, and I go to extra help, but it’s just not like my strong point.”** Similarly, another male student complained about his parents, **“I feel like they’ve always had this like mindset that like as long you’re working really hard your grades will be high. I’m like no, no, especially not junior year.”**¹⁵

Quantitative evidence from the survey showed that grades were the top source of stress for female students and among the top two, alongside homework, for male students:

¹⁵ *Id.*



A large amount of literature has reached similar conclusions as this study, which are too numerous to summarize within the space constraints of this report but are highly recommended.¹⁶

¹⁶ See, e.g., Pascoe, Michaela C., Sarah E. Hetrick, and Alexandra G. Parker. "The impact of stress on students in secondary school and higher education." *International journal of adolescence and youth* 25.1 (2020): 104-112; Wuthrich, Viviana M., Tess Jagiello, and Vanessa Azzi. "Academic stress in the final years of school: A systematic literature review." *Child Psychiatry & Human Development* 51 (2020): 986-1015; Suldo, Shannon M., et al. "Predictors of success among high school students in advanced placement and international baccalaureate programs." *Gifted Child Quarterly* 62.4 (2018): 350-373; Kulakow, Stefan, Diana Raufelder, and Frances Hoferichter. "School-related pressure and parental support as predictors of change in student stress levels from early to middle adolescence." *Journal of Adolescence* 87 (2021): 38-51; Endleman, Shari, Heather Brittain, and Tracy Vaillancourt. "The longitudinal associations between perfectionism and academic achievement across adolescence." *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 46.2 (2022): 91-100; O'Brien, Kimberly H. McManama, et al. "Why adolescents attempt suicide: a qualitative study of the transition from ideation to action." *Archives of suicide research* 25.2 (2021): 269-286; Skinner, Ellen A., and Emily A. Saxton. "The development of academic coping in children and youth: A comprehensive review and critique." *Developmental Review* 53 (2019): 100870.

IV. CHALLENGES WITH THE PROFILE INITIATIVE

Notwithstanding the strengths of the Profile Initiative, there are several potential challenges that the Committee believes the District should keep in mind. First, developing a Profile Initiative is subject to the risk of definitional ambiguity and over-breadth. Second, there are questions about whether some elements of the Profile Initiative may be beyond the ability of the District to bring about in an educational setting. And finally, it might be challenging for the District to guide students in making the tradeoffs that are necessary for implementing the Profile Initiative in daily life.

A. The Profile Initiative is subject to the risk of definitional ambiguity and overbreadth.

One might take the view that the Profile Initiative seeks to set forth a series of values, which inspire the student body to aspire to ideals beyond academic performance. But if the purpose of the Profile Initiative is to define goals and objectives other than traditional academic goals, there should be some way that students can determine whether or not they are making progress towards those goals. In addition, there should be generally acceptable mechanisms that can be used by educators to assist students in achieving these aspirations as well as assess students' progress. As in other districts, if the Profile Initiative is to mean anything at all, it cannot simply be a restatement of abstract ideals that are difficult to measure, with the expectation that every individual can plausibly achieve them.

Consider the element “embodies a love of learning and curiosity of spirit” under the category “Lifelong Learner.” What exactly does it mean for a student to “embody a

love of learning and curiosity of spirit?” Is it reasonable for a student to embody a love of learning when they experience moments of frustration in academic courses? How does one become more curious on a day-to-day basis or over the course of one’s academic career? These concepts can be difficult to measure and define, much less determine when one is achieving these overarching goals.

Or consider the “empathetic and generous” element of being a “Compassionate Leader.” How is empathy measured? What degree of generosity should students aspire to? How can one determine whether or not a SHS graduate displayed empathy and generosity? In theory these are difficult to measure, may not be easily observable in day-to-day life, and are highly subjective by their very nature. Similar critiques can be applied to criteria like “prepared to take risks,” which could arguably be said for anyone, anywhere, at any time. A person’s degree of risk aversion is a highly personal and contextual characteristic with no right or wrong answer.

Many elements of the Profile Initiative are clearly intended to measure more than generic, abstract ideals that are universally applicable. For example, the “Skillful Practitioner” bucket includes “effectively communicates in verbal and written form.” Effective communication skills are measurable and observable. Moreover, individuals who may not achieve outstanding performance on traditional academic metrics may nonetheless develop impressive and effective communication skills. The fact that the Profile Initiative includes some achievable goals like these demonstrates the challenges presented by other categories, like “engages in a journey towards self-actualization,” that are difficult to define under the best of circumstances and highly subjective.

Because these concepts are vague and difficult to define, the Profile Initiative runs the risk of contributing to stresses that it may be seeking to remedy. That seems particularly likely to occur if students feel that the ideals put forth in the Profile Initiative are unattainable—perhaps because, unlike traditional academic metrics, certain of these characteristics are not easily measurable or may not be reasonably attained by significant segments of the student population such as those with special educational needs.

To be sure, we recognize that the District is in the nascent stages of creating the Profile Initiative, and that it is engaging in a strategic planning process to deepen the Profile Initiative. Most recently, Dr. Patrick's presentation of the First Draft 2024-9 Strategic Plan and Plan Development Summary Report at the Board of Education meeting on May 13, 2024¹⁷ highlighted the ongoing development of the Profile Initiative as a key action area within the plan. Furthermore, the Profile Initiative discussion now appears to encompass all learning levels, with elementary and middle school students being considered through the development of a “Profile of a Learner.” The Committee also recognizes the District's emerging work in developing a “Profile of a Scarsdale Educator,” and assessing current programs offered within the A School and CHOICE for approaches that could be transferable to the entire learning community. We hope these comments are helpful to the District as it engages in this worthy and important effort.

¹⁷ [2024-29 Strategic Plan & Plan Development Summary Report](#)

B. Some elements of the Profile Initiative may be beyond the ability of the District to bring about in an educational setting.

The aspects of the Profile Initiative raise important and complex questions concerning the capabilities of K-12 education. Schools play an incredibly significant role in developing students beyond merely the cognitive and analytical elements of K-12 education. There is no question that certain goals of the Profile Initiative, such as “being willing to stand up for what is right while being mindful of the impact of actions on others,” are critically important aspirations, but it is unclear how one would measure outcomes related to those aspirations, much less evaluate the capability of the District to deliver on those outcomes.

Consider the components on the right-hand side of the Profile Initiative, i.e., those relating to being a lifetime learner, compassionate leader, and non-SIBI community member. Once the District decides on a “Profile,” it would be helpful if the District put in place a framework to empower K-12 educators to help teach toward these goals that speak to character qualities.

Again, the issue is not that those values are unimportant or unworthy of the District’s commitment, but achieving those outcomes may prove difficult within the four walls of the school. There is also a possibility that a portion of parents and community members will look upon the District’s attempts to imbue certain qualities in their children to be an unwarranted interference in parental responsibilities and values – though, to be clear, the Committee does not share that view.

We believe it would be most helpful for the District to clarify that these are aspirational goals that will be taught throughout the curriculum. To the extent that specific skills are identified, it would be useful to develop concrete criteria that can be realized within the educational environment. To the extent attributes are identified, it would be helpful if the District provides some examples of behavior or accomplishments that illustrate the attribute and articulates how it intends to measure success in developing these attributes in Scarsdale students.

C. By setting forth an ideal vision of a SHS graduate, the Profile Initiative may fail to guide students in making the tradeoffs necessary for implementing the portrait in daily life.

One important conflict within the Profile Initiative, as in other “Profiles” and “Portraits” that have been developed across the country, is that there are many elements within the Profile Initiative, ranging from concrete measurable outcomes, like “actively identifying and solving problems” or “appreciating different perspectives” to broader, non-academic value development along the lines of “being prepared to take risks.” Even if these differing values and educational goals can, in fact, be developed within the four walls of Scarsdale Schools, they may at times be in conflict with each other and difficult for educators as well as students to reconcile with any consistency.

The broad elements that encompass the Profile Initiative might suggest to students that they will have to make difficult choices. Suppose, for example, a student seeks to augment standard high school classes with a semester-long project consistent with those

aspects of the Profile Initiative that go beyond ordinary academic performance. The question will inevitably arise, how much time to spend on homework and exams versus that sort of semester-long project? Students may feel confused and lacking in clear direction as to how to balance these tradeoffs and will need appropriate support and guidance. Although the scenario described above could pose a challenge today, a “Profile Initiative” could make the challenge starker.

The breadth of goals the Profile Initiative contains may have the unintended consequence of adding to the mental health difficulties and stress that our students experience, especially if they are not guided on making these tradeoffs. Indeed, in order for the Profile Initiative to amount to something more than simply additional metrics for success in an already stressful high school experience, it seems necessary to make recommendations regarding tradeoffs if students are presented with the “Profile.” Because no one individual can achieve every element of the Profile Initiative with perfection, it follows that even the strongest graduates of SHS are going to trade off one area for another. If the Profile Initiative fails to inform students or at least guide them at a high level on making these sorts of tradeoffs, we fear that it may end up introducing higher stress levels that could diminish the benefits it seeks to promote. That said, it is important to note that the District has an opportunity to manage these issues well, and perhaps better than in other districts with fewer resources.

A simple example going back to the conversation around college admissions might concern the tradeoff between academic performance—top grades—and non-academic exposure such as community involvement. These are the sort of tradeoffs that college

admissions advisors would likely inform students about on a regular basis. Of course, whether a given tradeoff is appropriate for a given student is an individualized question. The critique here is not that the Profile Initiative specifies a single tradeoff that would be universally applicable to all SHS students, but that the District should provide some sort of guidance as to what these tradeoffs are likely to be. As teachers need to be trained on how to teach the qualitative goals here, the students need mentors who can help them make individual choices on how best to actualize their own “Portrait.”

One way this may be accomplished is to discuss how the minimum performance targets that apply in academic subjects can be applied to non-academic activities. Another might be to identify ways to achieve more than one goal of the Profile Initiative at the same time. “Seeking out and making interdisciplinary connections” could be compatible with being “deeply invested in a community,” depending on the case. An interdisciplinary project located in the community might achieve these two goals simultaneously. Thus, one example of a tradeoff might be guiding students to look for opportunities that are not necessarily “perfect” from the standpoint of a single value—e.g., interdisciplinary opportunities—if they also achieve a second value, such as community impact.

Ultimately, it is not necessarily in students’ best interests to be given a potpourri of choices or even soft mandates without any advice as to how to maximize their chances that a particular outcome will be attained. Perhaps students should be encouraged to seek opportunities that prioritize certain attributes over others while ensuring that certain academic minimums are simultaneously achieved. We encourage the District to clarify the role of faculty and staff in achieving this outcome.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROFILE INITIATIVE

A. Recommendation #1: Adopt the NYS Portrait as Much as Possible

The Committee suggests that the District adjust the proposed Profile Initiative to align with the NYS Portrait of a Graduate while adding concrete definitions with measurable criteria, focusing on empowering graduates with real-world skills and experience. There are many similarities between the District’s proposal and the proposed NYS Portrait, and there are substantial benefits to tracking the approach that was carefully developed for all of the State’s school districts. Moreover, there are substantive reasons to move toward the proposed NYS Portrait; the attributes in the NYS Portrait labeled as “Literate Across the Content Areas,” “Cultural Competence,” “Social-Emotional Competence,” and “Global Citizen,” for example, would be good additions to the District’s framework. These attributes represent at once a recognition of the continued importance of content learning and the recognition of the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion principles.

That said, there are certain elements of the District’s proposed Portrait Initiative that the Committee believes would be valuable to maintain. This includes the “Non-SIBI Community Member” attribute. This could be folded into the NYS Portrait’s “Global Citizen” attribute. Relatedly, we encourage the District to include bullet points under each attribute, as in the Administration’s proposed “Profile.” These bullet points can assist the District in customizing the NYS Portrait for Scarsdale.

B. Recommendation #2: Clearly Integrating the Profile Initiative and the Strategic Plan

The Committee believes “Profile” or “Portrait” will only have value if the District shapes curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular programming with the “Profile” as a clear reference point. This past year, the District presented the Profile Initiative to the community at a series of World Café Dialog meetings in the fall of 2023. The discussion of Profile Initiative concepts made clear its importance within the District’s strategic plan. Indeed, the Profile Initiative is designated as a key action area within the Draft Strategic Plan presented by Dr. Patrick at the May 13, 2024 Board of Education meeting. The draft plan also contemplates the expansion of the “Profile” framework to include the development of “Profile of a Learner” to cover elementary and middle school student experiences, and “Profile of a Scarsdale Educator” to include educators at all levels of instruction.

The Committee recommends that the BOE and Administration determine qualitative and quantitative metrics to assess the District’s success in achieving the goals of its Profile Initiative. The District may consider contacting other school districts engaged in Profile initiatives to compare assessment methodologies.

C. Recommendation #3: Engage with Students About Balancing

After rolling out the Strategic Plan and, presumably, a revised “Profile Initiative,” the District should arrange for teachers, counselors and/or building leaders to present the “Profile Initiative” to students and should take steps to ensure that the message that

perfection is not expected is clearly delivered. Guidance should be provided regarding how students might make tradeoffs in terms of what they prioritize. In advance of this work, the District should research how student engagement has been done in similar districts, as well as look for guidance provided by the New York State Education Department in connection with the NYS Portrait of a Graduate that we expect will soon be adopted by the Board of Regents.

D. Recommendation #4: Broadening the Senior Options Program

The Senior Options program, in its current form, provides students with a capstone internship experience at a business or workplace. But the program is limited: it runs from May to June of graduation, which is a short duration for an internship and may limit the extent to which students receive substantive experience. Other high schools have programs of longer duration that are more deeply integrated into the student curriculum. According to *Education Week* magazine, at one Nashville high school, students are working off-campus at internships two out of five days a week.¹⁸ Even with a lesser time commitment per week, SHS students could be gaining deeper experience through quarter- and year-long internships. Summer internships could also be a much stronger focus, particularly during the sophomore, junior, and senior years (even post-graduation).

We recognize that the District is constrained in this respect by New York State graduation requirements. We believe it would be fruitful to examine the aforementioned

¹⁸ <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-high-school-internships-for-all-a-five-step-process/2018/04>

Blue-Ribbon Report¹⁹ to determine whether there is any increased flexibility in this regard. We also support greater collaboration with organizations outside the District, such as the PTA and the Scarsdale Forum, in identifying alumni who are willing to host SHS students in an internship capacity. We recognize that there are certain complexities around insurance and liability that would need to be addressed.

E. Recommendation #5: Incorporate More Individualized, Project-Based Learning Into the Curriculum

Group-based instruction and assessment can only go so far toward evaluating the capabilities, talents, and work ethic of individual students. High schools that are succeeding at curricular innovation tend to incorporate individualized, project-based learning and evaluation into the core curriculum.²⁰ These may take the form of independent study, reading groups, and ad hoc workshops. For these opportunities to be effective, they should receive the same course credit as ordinary elective courses, including appropriate methods of assessment.

We recognize that the District is already incorporating project-based learning opportunities into the curriculum and that the SHS faculty are deeply engaged in developing assessments of this type. For example, the District can point to courses such as Social Entrepreneurship at the high school, which is built on curricular innovations and

¹⁹ *Supra*, p. 11.

²⁰ See, e.g., Nashville Big Picture High School, <https://bigpicture.mnps.org/> (“Students learning through workshops, projects, internships and real-world experiences.”).

project-based learning, to illustrate the tools being used to achieve the goals of the Profile Initiative.

F. Recommendation #6: Consider Pedagogical and Curricular Reforms Based on Emerging Research and Technological Change

Research shows that traditional methods of classroom instruction are often inferior to other formats that are better suited to individual learning styles. One example is the “flipped” classroom, in which students are expected to review the material before class (often via prerecorded mini-lectures) and the entire classroom time is dedicated to discussing the material in groups or as a class as a whole.²¹ In addition to pedagogical reform, the District should consider whether some curricular reform may be warranted, particularly in areas involving tremendous technological change like artificial intelligence, machine learning, and coding/engineering skills more generally. Students who do not intend to work in a technical field will still benefit from exposure to these concepts.

As previously noted, pedagogical and curricular reform in an era of computational innovation and artificial intelligence can also further efforts at achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) by increasing the importance of social learning, where differences in life experience are valuable inputs to these systems and the collaborative process. Because social media, generative AI and other emerging technologies are particularly vulnerable to

²¹ See, e.g., Rebecca Torchia, *What Is the Flipped-Classroom Model, and What Does It Look Like in K–12 Schools Today?*, EDTECH MAGAZINE, <https://edtechmagazine.com/k12/article/2022/01/what-flipped-classroom-model-and-what-does-it-look-k-12-schools-today-perfcon#:~:text=In%20a%20flipped%20classroom%2C%20also,the%20concepts%20in%20the%20classroom>

“echo chamber” problems, DEI becomes a particularly important goal to pursue against the backdrop of novel forms of curricular innovation.

We recognize that there is a range of creative problem-solving-based planning and performance-based assessments in place throughout the curriculum at SHS. We also appreciate that there is a robust internal structure of internal learning through the Scarsdale Teacher Institute (STI), which engages regularly with recent innovations in teaching and learning. We encourage the District to continue to increase its emphasis on integrating STEAM within the curriculum and to continue to discuss the integration of AI into classroom instruction.

G. Recommendation #7: Leverage Scarsdale’s Vast Alumni Network and Regional Proximity to Institutions of Higher Education

There seems to be widespread agreement that the District’s alumni network is underutilized. Scarsdale alumni would likely be willing to help high school students secure internships in the region, whether at local businesses or in New York City. Some collaboration between the Scarsdale Alumni Association and the Scarsdale School Education Foundation could support a number of alumni/student opportunities. As an example, the Bronx High School of Science offers "Summer Institutes," which are enrichment programs funded by the Bronx Science Alumni Foundation with content led by

alumni. These “Summer Institutes” are offered in AI, arts, entrepreneurship, media, robotics, programming, and research.²²

The District’s proximity to leading institutions of higher education, including Columbia, NYU, and Yale, provides a wealth of untapped opportunities for Scarsdale students. Professors at these institutions are regularly approached by high school students at other schools for internship and research opportunities. By building relationships with the institutions, the District could connect students with faculty who could serve as external supervisors for independent studies or collaborative projects.

VI. CONCLUSION: DEEPENING TIES BETWEEN THE DISTRICT AND THE SCARSDALE FORUM

We encourage the District to consider working with the Forum to deepen its engagement with alumni and other stakeholders in the community who may or may not be actively engaged with existing institutions like the PTA. The Forum’s membership roster and community stature could be enlisted to help Scarsdale students acquire real-world skills and experience in a variety of concrete ways. Further, the Forum provides another channel of communication between the District and the broader community. We are confident that, after analyzing the tenets of the “Portrait of a Graduate,” we can provide the District with a unique perspective with which to develop and improve this initiative.

²² https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IxEatfPCbFsAhrYePZtjpow_GcHmWtR_XEr4YnBUPhI/edit

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