



State of the School Address

Good evening and thank you for your interest in North Cross School. Since beginning this tradition of State of the School addresses six years ago, we have seen tremendous change here at North Cross. From our original intent to reassure a school population made nervous by financial mismanagement, the State of the School address has morphed into an opportunity to speak of our successes and to describe the future of our school. These changes are testimony to the commitment of our parents, the dedication of our faculty and staff, and the hard work of our students.

First, let me say that our school has been, and remains financially stable. For the third straight year, we operated with a slight operating surplus, the first such three-year period since the new millennium. The recently graduated Class of 2016 offered clear evidence of the increased strength of our academic program with our graduates achieving remarkable success in gaining admission to our flagship universities. 17 of 19 applicants were accepted to Virginia Tech, 14 of 15 applicants accepted to the University of Virginia, and 5 of 7 applicants were accepted at the College of William And Mary. And that leaves out a lengthy list of some of the best liberal arts colleges in the country.

I have no doubt in my mind when I say that the success we achieved in college admissions was not by accident and that year in and year out, we are the premier school in the Valley. Dare I say it so early in my address, there has never been a better time to be at North Cross. As cliché as that may sound, allow me to highlight a few of our successes before turning to our bright future.

Our recent graduates attend some of the very best colleges and universities in the United States and occasionally abroad. We are justifiably proud that great schools recognize the increasing value of a North Cross diploma.

As we work to create the perfect education for students entering a globally connected world, we provide our students access to the world and to different cultures, via international students on our campus, and through our first international campus in Shanghai. We currently have international students from 9 different countries on our Roanoke campus and North Cross—Xinhe will grow by another 21 students this February to a total of 150 students in grades 9-12.

The number of AP scholars has grown exponentially as has the number of students awarded district and state recognition as members of our band, our choral group, and as athletes.

This fall marked a high water mark for our athletic program as our athletes astounded us with their skill. Girls Tennis, Volleyball, Girls Cross-Country, Soccer, and Football were all champions in their conferences and Field Hockey placed second. And our Girls Tennis team won the State Championship, our 11th state championship in the past decade.

But enough of the litany of successes and improvements that so often pepper this address. Instead, I want you to ask yourselves why you send your children to North Cross and why perhaps, your parents sent you here. I do not believe it is because of the number of AP Scholars, or athletic successes, or college admissions, although they are important. Rather, I believe it is because North Cross consistently creates an environment where your child's curiosity and individualism are valued, where children are not pigeon-holed into being an athlete, or a scholar, or an actor. Where the

all-state football player also gets to be King Henry for four days. Or where an award-winning jazz pianist, accompanies our youth symphony flute playing, all-state tennis player to create a Shakespearean soundtrack. We take these occurrences as ordinary, but they are in no way common at other schools in our area.

North Cross is uncommon and because of that we play a huge role in the future growth of Roanoke. Roanoke is in the middle of a well-documented transition from a “train” town to a “brain” town, a transition that requires an excellent independent school to attract new business and residents. Like the energized downtown area, running races and outdoor festivals, new libraries, and yes, good public schools, an excellent independent school is an important marker for new and relocating businesses. The acquisition of Meridium by GE Capital, the expansion of the medical school to full partnership with Virginia Tech, and the creation of a \$300 million neurosciences center speak to a vibrant, intellectual future for our city. These things are real, they are happening, and as good as North Cross is at present, it is incumbent upon us to look to our future to make sure we provide a growing Roanoke with the educational institution it needs.

Parents of the Valley’s new intellectual workforce, as well as our current parents, expect North Cross to produce creative problem solvers and curious innovators. They want children who are active local citizens while also being globally nimble. They want a school that will allow their children to attend more selective colleges. In short, they want what they can get from the very best independent schools in the country.

We have already done much of the academic heavy lifting. With each passing year, our students get closer to fluency in a second language. As evidenced by our improved ERB scores, Singapore mathematics provides us with a much stronger foundation for our students. Music, art and physical education remain fully integrated in the lower school curriculum. Our middle school remains focused on providing the organizational and study skills necessary to meet the challenges of our more demanding upper school. And once in the upper school, our students take advantage of the opportunities available to them: 43% participate in more than one sport, sometimes in the same season; this past year the average student performed over 25 hours of community service though they were required only 12.5; 48% participate in after-school theater or music programs; over 25% of the upper school student body or participate in model UN programs;

We have reached a point where our program is exceptional and now we need to focus on providing the facilities necessary to allow these programs to achieve their full potential. Our auditorium is dated and insufficient for the scale of our performing arts. The fact that we have overcome our limitations to perform full-sized musicals like Oklahoma! is nothing short of a miracle. We are not able to fit our concert band on the stage, relegating band concerts to the dining hall. And don’t get me started on the harvest gold plastic seats...

We must focus on updating Willis Hall, our upper school, in much the same fashion as our middle school renovation. Leaky roofs and cantankerous heating and air conditioning systems are not the sign of a world-class independent school. Nor does our current facility match the quality of our program.

Like our new Cook Athletic Field, and the recently renovated Carter Athletic Center, we need for all our athletic facilities to mirror the high level of success our players and teams achieve. Toward this end, we need to continue to work on the quality of our playing surfaces.

CrossWalk has excelled in attracting families to North Cross by successfully remediating the challenges of high potential students with learning differences. Perhaps no other program at North Cross is as unique and desired by potential parents as this program. With the accompanying tutoring program for all North Cross students, we are already running short of space.

And finally, our library is horribly dated and not reflective of what a 21st century learning center requires. While keeping the warmth of our current lower school library, we must also recognize the need to fully explore the opportunities emerging technologies make available to our students and which our world expects young people to employ.

So, clearly we are positioning ourselves to be part of the bright future of Roanoke. We must continue to incrementally increase the quality of all of our programs but we must also enhance the curb appeal of our school to mirror the high quality educational experience we deliver inside our walls. In this way, we will attract more talented students to our campus, eventually reaching full enrollment. Already, our middle school is at capacity and I expect our upper school to be at a seven-year high in enrollment next year.

I think I can speak for our admissions team when I say they will be excited to admit from a “waiting list” of talented individuals. Once we become a “waiting list” school, we will not only improve our selectivity, but will also reinforce what we already know: North Cross delivers the unique program essential to securing our young people’s success in life. Having a full school means more revenue to support our programs, without adding significant increased expense to serve our students. I invite you to a more in-depth look into how tuition dollars are spread across our classrooms by reviewing the Finance 101 videos on our [website](#).

It is an enjoyable time to be at North Cross as we look to the future. There is much work to do and I invite you to collaborate. I’ve already begun individual conversations with our parents to determine your thoughts on growing our school to its potential, its leadership position in our community, and beyond. My door to your ideas is always open.

I became more encouraged about our future following our recent accreditation visit by the Virginia Association of Independent Schools. Our visiting team conducted a rigorous and thorough examination of our school, reviewing volumes of information prepared for their on-campus visits, spending two days at North Cross-Xinhe and two additional days on our Roanoke campus. They were so pleased with what they saw on our campus that they concluded their visit early, a first for me in my 18 years at independent schools. The VAIS team explained that they had seen all they needed to see and told us they were highly confident our school is well-managed, our vision for our future is clear, and that the programs we are implementing and planning are the right steps toward a secure and progressive future.

Such results do not occur without preparation, and I would like to publicly thank Deborah Jessee and Jennifer Landry for their hard work preparing for our visit. With this effort behind her, Deborah has returned to her passion for classroom instruction and curriculum, working with our School and Department Heads. Deborah continues to spend time surveying the classrooms, getting to know them on a molecular level so that she can be sure our curricula progress smoothly through the different divisions. In this, I hope to make North Cross a more holistic and intentionally progressing program through every grade.

I can’t help but believe that a large part of our successful VAIS accreditation was due to our much improved financial picture. Our debt, never crippling, but certainly bothersome, will be paid off next year; our annual fund donations are up compared with this time last year; our venture in China is growing ahead of schedule; and we are poised to use this momentum to bring our campus up to the standards of excellence we accomplish every day in our classrooms.

And for those of you who have stayed with me so far, I can tell you that for the seventh straight year, we have reduced the rate of growth in our tuition. This year our increase is an overall average of 3.5%, a prudent increase that allows us to provide salary raises for our faculty and to create for the first time, a plant replacement fund equal to 1% of our net tuition revenues. We are on pace to finish this year in fine shape and we have once again approved a balanced budget for next year, a budget that affords a small rainy day fund.

I am certainly very pleased with the milestones we have achieved at North Cross and I look forward to watching our school attain a position among the very best in the country. I remain deeply thankful for all the effort by our faculty and staff and appreciative of the sacrifices you make as parents to provide the very best education for your children.

Thank you.

Christian J. Proctor, PhD
Head of School