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Graphic Illustration by Hannah Polk

Prep unwraps Christmas surprise

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Just in time for the holiday season, Head of School Lawrence Coco had a spectacular announcement for the Jackson Prep community: Prep will soon have an elementary school. The school announced on December 8 that the board plans to expand the curriculum to grades Pre-K through fifth grade in a gradual rollout. The school will add a fifth grade to the newly renovated junior high next year, and the additional grades will be added the following year (2023-2024) on Prep's campus.

According to Mr. Coco, this idea has been discussed since Jackson Prep's inception. The COVID pandemic put a pause on the conversation but also fueled the board's desire to put it into action. This spring, a committee was appointed to discuss plans for a potential expansion. In order to "keep up" with the competitive school environment around Mississippi, Prep plans

the expansion with the hope to make the standard of excellence available to children of all ages. Jackson Prep's goal has always been to "expand its educational footprint," and the administration plans to "create a new and innovative approach to elementary education" by following the precedent the junior high and senior high schools have set. By introducing students to arts, athletics, and academics at younger ages, the school will give students the chance to gain more exposure to the wide array of activities available here. Mr. Coco hopes that students coming out of the new elementary school will be better prepared to succeed academically and take advantage of the opportunities that await them in the JH and SH.

One might ask—where will all of these children go? The location of the elementary school is currently planned to be on the school's 84-acre Lakeland Drive campus. The exact location and details have yet to be released. The elementary school will be purposefully separated from the junior high and senior high build-

ings. All interaction between upper- and lower- classmen will be completely intentional in nature; the elementary school will most likely have a separate cafeteria, gym, and playground to accommodate its needs. There will also be "pathways" for the younger students to interact intentionally with the older students. Mr. Coco said he was particularly excited about the opportunity senior high students have to help with elementary school carpooling. As a whole, Mr. Coco hopes that Jackson Prep's elementary school will have "...an innovative, creative, and future-focused curriculum, for the elementary students, concentrating on engaging students and teaching 21st century skills."

The search for a new head of the elementary division has already begun, and the board hopes to have someone hired by this summer. The head will then have a full year to become acclimated to the character of Prep and will also be involved in the plans of the newest additions. Another impactful decision is that Prep will offer an academic

support and dyslexia program at every level.

With the expansion, Prep plans to continue the strong relationships with feeder schools such as First Presbyterian Day School and Christ Covenant School, which have traditionally sent Prep the most new students. Prior to the finalizing of plans, the boards of both FPDS and Prep met to discuss the future expansion, with Mr. Coco saying the goal was to be "completely transparent."

The fifth grade will launch first, in the fall semester of 2022, while the remainder of the new classes will begin in the fall semester of 2023. The first class of fifth graders will consist of two sections of fifth graders, and it will function very similarly to the already established sixth grade. Prep has a goal of enrollment for around 30 to 40 students per grade; however, this number is still flexible as decisions are still underway. Details on admission are still in development, but they will be released closer to the 2022 school year.

Mr. Coco says he is espe-

cially excited for the effect of the expansion on the Prep community.

Mr. Coco believes that younger students will not only bring bright smiles to the campus but also a positive energy that the Prep atmosphere could use during the school days.

This also will give senior high and junior high students the chance to mentor younger students on the campus and make a difference in their lives.

With the arrival of an early Christmas surprise, the board and administration of Prep hopes that the future is very merry and bright indeed.

-Olivia Smith also contributed to this story