Our Community Query:
How can I ensure that my experiences this summer prepare me to be a stronger student and a more compassionate friend in the next school year? — Middle School TASQUE

Among Friends

Lower School

Middle School

Upper School

Q: What happens when we put students in charge?
A: Amazing things...

Also Inside

“You chose a Quaker school for your family…”

John Scardina, Quaker-In-Residence | Page 13
As I write this feature story for our final 2017-18 issue of Among Friends, I am reminded that I have just days to write and deliver a graduation speech to the class of 2018. It’s a task that requires one to both reflect and to look ahead.

In fact, the entire 2017-2018 school year was one that could be described as reflecting in service of envisioning our future as we engaged in a strategic planning process that spanned nine full months.

If each interaction were an individual touchpoint we can proudly claim our successful engagement of hundreds and hundreds of parents, students, alumni, and colleagues through forums, focus groups, interviews and surveys. Our process was a rich one marked by strong efforts at outreach and inclusivity. The influence of nearly the entire Friends Academy community will have an imprint on this plan, which is now in the final drafting phase. The Strategic Plan will be adopted over the summer and launches officially in September.

Important elements will include clarity and alignment around the mission, revisioning the use of space and time, community and student health and well-being, and commitment to a distinct academic vision.

Beyond the strategic plan process for me, this year was one of appreciative inquiry, a model predicated on asking the right questions at the right time in a school’s history. It was a year of continued discovery and to appreciate the best of what is Friends

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Friends Academy admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges, programs and activities available to students at the school. Friends does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin in the administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, financial assistance program, athletic and other school-administered programs.

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From the Head

Andrea Kelly
Head of School

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Academy. A time to dream and imagine ‘what we could be’ as we envision a preferred future. We are in the process of designing ‘what should be’ as we bring together the best of what ‘is’ with ‘what might be.’ Our Strategic Plan will be our roadmap to how our next chapter is literally delivered and embedded in our community from classroom, to the playing field, the stage and to our families.

The year was punctuated by moments of immeasurable joy. Our athletic teams did us proud advancing through the ranks to thrill us with a number of “too-close-for-comfort” heart-stopping wins in play-off rounds. The staging of Mary Poppins gave over 100 students the opportunity to delight us with acting, dancing and singing. We opened our doors to host regional chess and robotics tournaments and Congressman Tom Suozzi reminded us of the importance of communication and collaboration across party lines. The AFSC Banners Project, “100 Years of Waging Peace” connected students to issues of equality, poverty, identity and peacekeeping during our Jan. 16-19th Peace Week celebration.

This is also the time of year we bid farewell to colleagues who will be moving on, a number of them retiring after long and successful careers at Friends Academy. We wish them joy and fulfillment as they, too write their next chapter. So, with this, I wish you all a healthy and joyful summer spent doing the things that make you happy.

At the Monday, May 21 all-parent workshop, “Building On Success,” parents were asked to text how they defined success for their child in one word to form the above shared group Wordle. What do you notice?

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“If you don’t support their business, they won’t support your business – and you won’t be able to be in business.”

- Abby Hylan, 5th grade Social Studies

We often talk about educating our students for the “jobs that don’t yet exist,” but what does that really mean and what does it look like in a classroom at Friends Academy? At an open all-parent meeting held earlier last week, we explored just that, using the theme “Building on Success,” as

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75 parents and staff shared ideas about next-generation skills, learned about new leadership teams and programs, watched video stories of student-centered learning happening right now in FA classrooms, and asked questions about our future together.

Friends Academy is already an exceptional school and we have implemented important and powerful changes to the teaching and learning environment. Educational leaders know, and our presentation highlighted, the real and exciting shifts that are already underway at Friends Academy.

The simplest way to describe our efforts is that Friends Academy teachers believe students should be at the center of the classroom experience.

What is Student-Centered Learning?

Educators use the term student-centered learning all the time, but how is it made manifest in our classrooms every day?

Let’s start with space. Inside a student-centered classroom, flexible furniture and an intentional room arrangement enable easy formation of small groups, so that students can puzzle through a problem or assignment together.

Student thinking is physically visible all around. An atmosphere of shared inquiry and student-generated ideas allows students to probe more deeply together. In an English class studying Othello, the essential question, “How does belief influence action?” is posted with student questions and textual citations on post-it notes affixed around the question. The digging for evidence and exploration of big ideas is visible, active and ongoing.

It continues with a mindset – both the teacher’s and the students’ – that shifts the definition of learning from simply knowing something in the moment, to understanding it.

We’re moving from students as passive recipients of content to students as self-directed, active learners; from teachers as deliverers of content to teachers as designers and facilitators of immersive learning environments.
“Most of it is writing to figure out if you understand it and can explain it.”

– Josh Sukoff, 8th grade Algebra

from assessments that measure mastery of content via written tests and exams where learning is assessed only by the teacher, to an assessment of skills, knowledge and habits of mind assessed by the student, peers and teachers; and from time-based learning, characterized by “one-shot, winner-takes-all” unit exams, to learning that is about achieving graduated competency broken down into skills and standards.

In a student-centered classroom, less time is devoted to factual questioning, but rather the students are synthesizing and analyzing at the highest levels. Eighth grade math teacher, Erin Nolan shares, “It’s all about creating more conceptual, less linear thinkers, more creative learners and less drill.” She goes on, “I now

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ask the student to prove their answer works instead of ‘check your answer.’ They have to defend their work.”

Approximations, experimentation and mistakes become another step on the journey toward mastery. Coming close to an answer or taking a divergent path to get there, is valued. Mistakes are posted alongside “correct answers” to be understood – and celebrated. Students might be provided multiple attempts on assessments to demonstrate content mastery or skill mastery, because for us, it’s not as important that they know something at 2:00 on a Tuesday so that the next unit can start on Wednesday.

Nolan’s students are unafraid of open-ended questions that allow for more than one way to get to a solution. “They can rework problems in which they’ve made mistakes and have multiple opportunities at mastery,” says Nolan. The feedback from the kids? “This is awesome.”

What’s important to us is that they’ve mastered the material, so that it can be used now and applied again and again, in flexible ways and in novel situations.

In a student-centered classroom, students take more ownership of their learning. The students are doing more of the talking, while teachers

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In AP Statistics, teacher Alex Burt designed a cumulative project that asked his students to synthesize lessons learned on labwork from the year and transfer those skills to an entirely original and novel scenario.
“(Visible learning) allows the students to be the center of the classroom.”

– Denise Lee, 10th Grade English

listen, provide prompts, extend original student thinking and guide as supportively as needed. Why is this important? It allows students opportunities to authentically grapple with the material, rather than be fed information. It is in the work, and sometimes in the struggle, where real learning takes place.

In Upper School, English teacher Jozeph Herceg supports his students as a guide. “In this class you get to create more of your own argument and you really become the leader of how you interpret the text, rather than a teacher telling you how to interpret the text,” shared sophomore Denise Lee.

Herceg wants student voices imprinted on the walls of their classroom – literally imprinted through copious post-it notes of student observations and thoughts. Deep analytical

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questioning, and collaboration, that requires students to present their analysis to the class are hallmarks of Herceg’s approach.

**The skills of tomorrow in a Friends Education**

While it is impossible to predict the future, we do know that there are competencies and habits of mind that our students will need in order to rise to the top. According to the World Economic Forum, among the top 10 skills for the next generation are creativity, emotional intelligence, coordinating with others, complex problem-solving, negotiation and cognitive flexibility.

As a Friends School we are uniquely equipped to develop all of these crucial skills in our students. It is precisely the framework of a Quaker Education that enriches the student-centered classroom. As students grow more comfortable sitting side by side with the unknown, they are able to focus on the genius of process over product.

The gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student is the brilliance in a Friends classroom. Students can organically develop a real connectivity based on collaboration, equity and compromise, in an environment where they connect the dots of their learning through active hands-on challenges, real-world problem solving and public analysis and presentation.

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In the 5th grade social studies program, students complete a six-week study on economics. The study places students in the center of their learning. They design their own business plan, respond to unforeseen challenges such as a sudden loss in profits, and learn about marketing, advertising, employment practices and price-setting.

The unit culminates in a day-long visit to Commerce Plaza where our young business leaders put their skills to the test working interdependently with other business owners and solving problems in real time.

When students are required to think for themselves and to take the appropriate amount of control of their learning they become autonomous, competent, confident people. This is a definition of success we can all get behind.

Students work in teams in which all members influence decision-making. Weinstein reminds her young entrepreneurs, “your voice may not be the loudest, but your voice counts; your opinion matters.”

In different disciplines and across each division at Friends, the practice of student-centered learning emanates from the idea that teachers are activating what they know is most empowering for kids and will truly transform them into confident and authentic learners, ever ready to stretch through boundaries.

“I continually ask questions because I know there is going to be some deeper, underlying message,” explained sophomore Jessie Goldblatt. “I’ve become a much better reader and analytical thinker.” Classmate Denise agrees. “It helped me to create my own ideas and push me out of my comfort zone.”
I am excited to announce new teams, structures and partnerships for the 2018-2019 school year.

Moving forward, our goal is to create cohesive support for students’ growth and development, both academically and through a re-envisioned, connected wellness program.

These intentional shifts are in direct response to student and parent feedback, as well as a recognition of what is needed in today and tomorrow’s world.

Starting on July 1, Jen Halliday will join Friends as the new Assistant Head of School & Director of Academic Affairs and will lead us in examining how we teach and learn.

Overseeing all curriculum from PK-12th grade, Jen will work with both division principals and the College Counseling Office.

Ron Baskind, our new Director of Student Affairs and Quaker Practice will lead a new team, including current and returning members of the FA community. (Please view the full team and position descriptions on the next page.)

Quaker Educational Consultant Jen Cort will also join the Student Life Team in an expanded role.

These are exciting times at Friends Academy and I look forward to your continued partnership and energy.

– Andrea Kelly

Core Academic Team

Jen Halliday
Assistant Head of School & Director of Academic Affairs

Division Principals
Debby McLean
Deborah Schoman
Mark Schoeffel

College Counseling
Ed Dugger
Jenn Dice
Jacky DiBlasi
The new Student Life Team & Quaker Practice is a comprehensive PK-12 team that unifies all efforts of our Quaker mission, including Quakerism, service learning, public purpose/civic engagement and stewardship, equity & inclusion, and health & wellness.

Ron Baskind  
Director of Student Affairs & Quaker Practice  
Unify FA’s Quaker mission

Camille Edwards  
Dean of Equity & Inclusion  
Works with students in areas of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Deidre Cooper  
Dean of Service Learning & Public Purpose  
Oversee a PK-12 vision for service learning and civic engagement.

Deborah Murphy  
Community Wellness Team Coordinator & Health Education Co-Coordinator

Christine Botti  
Health Education Co-Coordinator  
Co-lead development of a comprehensive wellness program for PK-12.

Michael Quinland  
School Psychologist & Student Wellness

Carolyn Pocius  
Assistant Dean of Students (Upper School)  
Student conduct and advising.

John Scardina  
Quaker-in-Residence  
Provide guidance on Quaker practice and education.

Jen Cort  
Quaker Educational Consultant  
Provide guidance on Quaker practice and education.
I am wrapping up this year as Quaker-in-Residence – a position that asks me to monitor the ways in which we “walk the walk” of Friends practice. What might be happening here for your student that would stand out as “Quaker” in their daily experiences?

- Starting and ending classes with a moment of silence – creating a “sacred space” and a “safe space” that is separate from the daily blur of activity;
- Explicit instruction and discussion in how the Quaker testimonies are demonstrated in the course of study: simple and straightforward relationships based upon trust, Quakers in history who strive for peace, the role of integrity in math (integers!), community building through student-directed learning, equity based upon a true sense of diversity and inclusion, respect and care for the planet through recycling and energy conservation, and active face-to-face service to others;
- A deep and abiding respect for child development – what we Quakers call the “continuing revelation” of our children as they “grow into goodness”

Worship Buddy activities create division-wide bonds that are long lasting for both older and younger students.

– that focuses on strengths, recognizes the developmental challenges at each grade level;
- A deepening sense of spirituality – enriched by Meeting for Worship here at school but enhanced by your own faith practice at home;
- A recognition that academic success is dependent upon social-emotional growth as well as cognitive growth. We can grow best in faith-based environments where

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we feel safe, loved, and challenged appropriately. Looking ahead, please understand that the “best college” for your child will be the “best fit” that can only be determined individually, not by some national ranking;

• A respect for fun – Maria Montessori said that play is the “work of childhood” and we need to be sure to play every day – all of us! Nurturing “that of the Divine in every one” comes easily through shared joy, and schools are good places for fun to happen.

Will all of this happen all of the time? No, of course not. William Penn called Pennsylvania (the only Quaker-run political entity in the history of European Americans) the “Holy Experiment,” and I call all Quaker schools “Holy Experiments” in trying to apply Quaker faith to daily Quaker practice. So – as with all experiments – there will be mistakes, unexpected challenges, and messiness. There will also be great successes, accidental discoveries with wonderful implications, and a good deal of trial-and-error.

This is a high bar I set for Friends Academy – it comes from 40 years in Quaker schools. But you want us to strive for excellence, don’t you?

I am glad you have joined us on this journey. I would love to chat more about this – let’s have a cup of tea someday soon…

Community Groups projects unite Worship Buddies in a shared service project. Community Groups meet several times a year.