Empowering Girls

In anticipation of the milestone 10th anniversary of Our Sisters’ School this fall, the Board of Trustees takes great pride in launching the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan, Empowering Girls. This plan aligns with the mission, vision, and core values of the School, and establishes a strategy for a strong and robust future. Building on almost a decade of achievement, OSS lays a clear and intentional path for continued success. People, Program and Place are the foundation of the Strategic Plan. Efforts to hire and retain quality teachers who embrace the School’s mission, and invest in excellent and targeted professional development are prioritized. OSS is committed to fostering additional experiences for staff to collaborate, innovate, and create expanded, hands-on opportunities to benefit all students. The plan also includes continued support of our alumnae in high school and college.

Building on the School’s rigorous educational program, the plan targets enhancements in STEAM classes (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math), the creation of a more sequenced and challenging health and fitness program, and more choices in music instruction. OSS has spent the last several years solidifying its core classes of visual arts, humanities, math, and science and will develop the same curricular and pedagogical integrity in these program expansions. All efforts will be scrutinized through the lens of the School’s mission and the benefits to the students.

In addition, we are broadening the use of the resources and partnerships in New Bedford through the Community as Campus initiative, where OSS works with the city’s businesses and community organizations for collaborative learning and teaching opportunities. Experiential education makes student learning relevant and allows for personal exploration beyond the classroom. In an area so rich with opportunities, there will be greater focus on expanding these partnerships for classes, internships, and operational support. With New Bedford as campus, OSS is actively involved with, and investing in, its very own community.

“Sharing the Strategic Plan with you, our loyal and steadfast supporters, is only the beginning,” said Board Co-president Lisa Schmid Alvord. “Our journey over the past nine years has been exhilarating, and this plan charts our course for the next few years which are full of continued promise and possibilities.”

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The Next Voyage
Part Artist, Part Innovator, Part Problem Solver, Pure Passion!

Meet Toby Eugenio, visual arts teacher extraordinaire. Her contributions are countless—her Art Choice Curriculum, STEAM program (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics), Dendrites classes, and Student Council Leadership have taken OSS to the next level since she joined the staff two years ago.

Q. Some say you’re always in motion and that your mantra is “every minute counts.” Is this true?

A. Yes! Life is about making memories and so, even with the jam-packed days at OSS, demands from my family and the additional organizations I am involved with, I keep a positive and forward-thinking mindset. While life gives us millions of challenges, it is how we handle them that matters. I encourage the OSS girls to respect one another, take risks, and believe in a world of possibility. Teaching is my calling, and I am thrilled to be a part of the OSS team where every one and every minute are valued.

Q. STEAM, Art Choice...what is it about teaching these subjects that inspires you?

A. I am committed to improving the lives of each student and integrating creative thinking into all that our girls do. I want students to use their own voices to approach a design challenge, create a work plan, make mistakes, share and think about the process, and then try again. In class, I offer a variety of tools to foster an authentic artistic journey, personalized for each girl, providing multiple opportunities for expression.

My goal is to encourage students to become good artistic thinkers and brilliant problem solvers, whether using robots, paint brushes, graphs, or any of the many tools available. This exploration allows me to envision new ideas and habits of mind to be used in STEAM classes. I want students to engage in problem-solving situations using a variety of STEAM tools and then design principles to arrive at workable solutions. Trying, faltering, rethinking and redesigning all create valuable learning situations and demand right- and left-brain thinking. The focus is on developing young learners who have a strong sense of themselves.

Q. Is it true you dressed as Ms. Frizzle from The Magic School Bus this fall?

A. Yes I believe modeling safe and creative risk-taking allows me to do lots of fun things to get the girls focused in my classes. If I am enthusiastic about art, robots, surveys and programing, the girls will be too. It is essential to celebrate student success by filling the school hallways with examples of student artwork, STEAM inventions, and research projects. Why be hemmed in by walls? We use the outdoors as a classroom as well. Let’s make learning challenging and enjoyable. The crazy dress was just another layer to the powerful story of learning.

Q. Your art room is full of brainstorming notes, inspirational posters, and sketches. How do you motivate the students?

A. Motivation is about making learning relevant and personal. I want the girls to learn something they can use in their lives outside the classroom. We encourage students to assess their own work, seek classmates’ input, and learn from each other to take on new challenges and risks as the year progresses. I am a firm believer in the value of first-hand learning and creating meaningful context to empower opportunities so students view learning as connected, not isolated. In the spring, our 6th grade humanities class creates an art show at the New Bedford Whaling Museum while studying the rich history of whaling and New Bedford’s role in this industry. The Museum and OSS teachers work with the girls so they can explain their piece of art or research topic to friends and family who attend the show. Visual and creative arts are intertwined with humanities and the students are engaged in making choices at each step in the process to maximize the learning experience.

Q. Dendrites and Bloom’s Taxonomy...why are these critical to learn about?

A. OSS continues to address the ever-changing field of pedagogy and the continual use of technology while providing valuable life skills and a mindset of achievement and excellence. By teaching students about Bloom’s Taxonomy, students are better able to understand where they are in the learning spectrum and where they are headed. I find this is one of the most valuable lessons I can teach. Building a common vocabulary for excellence is key as students strive to understand how to increase their learning capacity. In Dendrites class, through the use of surveys, visualization exercises, and mnemonic devices, students explore and learn how their own brains work best.

Q. And finally, why did you revive Student Council?

A. Student Council is an integral part of any student community. Ours is a volunteer council with the mission of upholding our Core Values: Excellence, Community, Citizenship, and Leadership. It provides students with the chance to create a positive community and take pride in belonging to something bigger than themselves. It also provides leadership opportunities — whether it is participating in the nation-wide Students In Action conferences or creating spirit-building events, I believe Student Council empowers our girls to use their voices and make a difference.

“I am committed to improving the lives of each student and integrating creative thinking into all that our girls do.”

Toby Eugenio

Looking Forward

by Sarah Herman, Head of School

Spring is a time when we can reflect on the winter’s work, and also be well into the process of looking forward to our 10th year just ahead! This 2016-17 school year included a deep dive into the accreditation process for the Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE). Pursuing accreditation allows us to reflect on student learning and growth as we measure our performance against a wide range of standards, best practices and our mission — this has been a goal of our school since our school was born almost 10 years ago. At OSS, we define and redefine ourselves each year. As a result of this effort, we know more clearly than ever who we are, and what we must do, as we continue to successfully educate middle school girls.

The beauty of the accreditation process is that it requires a thorough and thoughtful examination of all that we do and stand for. We are actively surfacing our strengths and weaknesses, and tightening our systems and procedures, while examining and documenting the ways we teach. We are focusing on the talent of our teachers and staff, and the impact of an OSS education on our students and alumnae. Dedicating time to this review helps us look forward and outward, as we hone our ambitious plans for the long-term dynamic future of OSS to achieve excellence.

This edition of Voyages provides us with yet another chance to reflect, document, and celebrate Our Sisters’ School. We highlight the experiences and successes of our students and alumnae, as these stories illustrate the many transformative opportunities that our school offers. We also share exciting news about our Strategic Plan — Empowering Girls — designed to enhance our programs, and further the quality of our students’ learning experiences.

We are moving forward with vision and determination. Our Sisters’ School must evolve in order to fulfill its robust mission. I believe this will inspire you to continue following and support our magnificent journey for the coming year and beyond.
The Next Voyage
Secondary School Update

The 15 eighth-grade girls in the Class of 2017 possess impressive drive and determination. They applied to 16 different schools, completing a total of 81 applications. We proudly report that each student received multiple acceptances.

Over 50% of this class will be attending independent schools garnering a total of $292,050 in scholarship awards. Five OSS girls accepted full scholarships to boarding schools and another three will be attending a private parochial school. Vocational schools continue to be a top choice, and this year all who applied were accepted to both Bristol County Agricultural High School and New Bedford Regional Vocational-Technical High School.

The Class of 2017 will attend:
Bishop Stang High School (3)
Bristol County Agricultural High School (2)
Dana Hall School (1)
Dartmouth High School (1)
Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational-Technical High School (4)
Loomis Chaffee School (1)
Phillips Academy Andover (1)
St. George’s School (1)
Westover School (1)

The Class of 2013 will attend:
Bridgewater State University
Bristol Community College
Brockton Hospital School of Nursing
Emmanuel College
Suffolk University
UMass Amherst
UMass Dartmouth

ALUMNAE NEWS

All 10 members of the Class of 2013 will be graduating high school this spring, and they continue the OSS tradition with 100% acceptance to higher learning institutions. Our alumnae applied to a combined total of 28 colleges and universities throughout New England and New York.

The third annual Senior Honor Dinner in March celebrated this class and as in years past, every eighth grader was assigned to an alumna to learn about her secondary school experience through individual interviews. The younger “Sister Sailors” then shared highlights of the seniors’ time in high school while each graduate gave advice to the eighth-grade class on how to succeed when they leave OSS. Some of the members of the Class of 2013 aspire to have careers in the law, nursing, engineering, design, and education, and they will be attending:

Class of 2017 students
Four Sister Sailors

OSS is humbled by the experiences and comments that our current students and graduates shared here. With the generous support of our donors and the community, OSS continues to make a profound difference—girl by girl, day by day.

Lyla ’20 • Fifth Grade

Lyla is the third in her family to attend OSS. Her oldest sister Maya ’14, a junior at Bishop Stang High School, returns on a regular basis as an academic tutor and choir melody. Lyla’s other sister, Nadia ’17, is in eighth grade and just received a full scholarship to attend Westover School in Connecticut this fall.

As part of the Max Warburg Courage Curriculum, the fifth grade participated in a writing competition this year. Lyla’s essay, Making a New Path, is one of 60 chosen nationally to be published in the 26th issue of the Max Warburg anthology. In her piece, Lyla draws on her acute awareness of the opportunities she has created for a positive path by staying in school, working diligently, and making a difference. Inspired by her daughters’ OSS experiences, Lyla’s mother returned to school and now has only one more semester to complete for her college degree.

Classroom lessons taught Lyla to think about courage in a new way. “I learned that there are so many different ways to show courage,” she writes. “It is not just about saving someone’s life or running into a burning building. Even small things count. Sometimes you do not even realize that you are being courageous. It can be something you do every day.” She explained that when faced with a challenge, we need to believe in ourselves and work to “fix it even if it takes time.”

Lyla credits OSS for her many amazing growth experiences. She values the support offered to everyone who makes mistakes and sees them as opportunities to learn. She appreciates the School’s Community Core Values and the “Community Tools” that encourage students to approach each day with enthusiasm, and each relationship with confidence and a positive growth mindset.

Thania ’17 • Eighth Grade

Thania’s older sister Vanesa- sali ’11 was a pioneer Sister Sailor in the first OSS sixth-grade class. She fondly remembers attending Family Fun Nights as a younger sibling and feeling the “positive nature of the School.” Now, as an eighth grade, she recognizes the power of collaboration between families and the School, and even helps create Family Fun Night activities for younger students to enjoy.

Thania has noticed remarkable growth in both herself and her classmates, “We were known as the immature fifth graders, and now we host weekly Community Meetings and are leaders in Student Council.”

She noted that her class entered the School during Ms. Herman’s first year as Head of School, “We have all grown together in so many ways, and Ms. Herman has taught us to understand how we can help strengthen our school culture, even as students.”

Student Council offers opportunities for students to make an impact — members help design educational experiences in and outside of the classrooms, and each girl develops a sense of achievement and pride through her work. Thania participates in volunteer projects and appreciates learning first-hand the importance of giving back to her community, “I am glad for all the connections OSS creates with other organizations around my city.”

“I would not even know about SAT exams or the many options available if it had not been for OSS. I thought I would be going to school here in New Bedford but in seventh grade, new choices were presented as I began truly thinking about the best environment for me,” Thania said, “Take the risk. Take the leap of faith and let go of the familiar as it leads you to have an open mind and to many opportunities.” She added that “letting go of the familiar” is one of the many important “Community Tools” that she learned at OSS, and she is actively practicing it as she aspires to be a cardiothoracic surgeon or a neurosurgeon.

Olimpia Andrade ’16
Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational-Technical High School (GNBVT) ’20

Olimpia is the third OSS sixth-grade student to attend GNBVT this fall. Olimpia is grateful to OSS for being an incubator of her strong core values and solid foundation of intellectual curiosity. She wants to pursue a career in Legal and Protective Services and has her sights set on attending a police academy, gaining experience and eventually joining the FBI. Olimpia is following the advice she offers to current OSS students, “Let yourself be open to new ideas.”

Irene Luperon ’11
St. George’s School ’15
University of California ’19

Irene is an impressive young woman. Her family enrolled her in the very first OSS sixth-grade class at OSS in 2008 and three years later, she was awarded a full scholarship to St. George’s School in Rhode Island. Irene is completing her second year at the University of Southern California, where she is majoring in neuroscience. Recently Irene reflected that “OSS is always on my mind,” and expressed great appreciation for so many lessons learned. She is continually grateful that the Morning Speaker program prepared her with active listening skills and challenged her ideas about

In Appreciation

The Libby Barrett Memorial Library Fund was established to honor the memory of Libby, daughter of former trustee Laurie Barrett and her husband David Barrett. OSS is deeply appreciative of this memorial and gifts to the Fund will be used for enhancing the resources of the School library.
Mission Statement:
Our Sisters’ School’s mission, as an independent, tuition-free, non-sectarian middle school, is to educate and inspire economically disadvantaged girls from the New Bedford area. OSS empowers girls to step into the future with valuable life skills and a mindset of achievement and excellence by providing a safe, supportive, and academically challenging environment.

Why “Our Sisters”?
During New Bedford’s storied past, it was uncommon for women to go on extended whaling voyages. Like these women, OSS students bravely embark on a voyage to engage in a rigorous learning environment that is carefully crafted, responsive, and integrated to support them as they become thoughtful community members and future leaders.

SUPPORT THE OSS ANNUAL FUND
Your generosity makes it possible for OSS to provide an extraordinary education for our inspired and deserving young girls. Make a gift today at www.oursisterssschool.org, or contact Georgie Goulding, Director of Advancement, at ggoulding@oursistersschool.org or 508-994-1255 to discuss the different ways you can help OSS.

Non-discrimination Statement
Our Sisters’ School, Inc. admits girls as students regardless of their race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, creed, or sexual orientation. The School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, creed, or sexual orientation in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, athletic and other school administered programs.

Our Sisters’ School, Inc. employs personnel of any race, color, national or ethnic origin, gender, gender identity, religion, creed, and sexual orientation to all the rights, privileges and activities generally accorded or made available to personnel at the School.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

- Festival of Arts and Achievement
  Thursday, June 8, 5:30pm – Family Night
  Friday, June 9, 5:30pm – Public Invited

- Graduation Ceremony
  Wednesday, June 21, 6:30pm, at OSS
  Invitations extended to alumnas and families

- Last day of School: Friday, June 23

- Car Wash: Sunday, August 13, 10:30am-2pm, at OSS
  Rain date: Sunday, August 20