“It was a bright, sunny morning,” recalls Executive Director Lisa Yates. “The girls began arriving at 7:15. They seemed excited, but also clearly nervous. We escorted them upstairs to wait for the morning meeting to begin. They sat silently while I spoke to them about the name of their new school ... about the Sister Sailors and the special voyage that lay ahead. They looked up at me with their large, eager eyes.”

Classroom teacher Mallory Cohn has a similar recollection: “What I remember most of all is how quiet the girls were. They seemed scared to death. To tell the truth, I knew how they felt. My own stomach had been aching all morning from nerves.”

The school day began. The teachers had various name games and “get-to-know-you” activities ready. The girls were shown around the building, assigned cubbies and given school supplies and books. During snack period, the girls at each table were challenged to identify five traits shared with their table-mates. There was an art class – and the first student work went up on the walls – and classroom surveys of individual interests and past experiences.

Then, impossibly quickly, it was time to go home. Ms. Yates recalls, “I entered the fifth-grade classroom. The teachers and all the girls turned to look at me in surprise. ‘Sorry to interrupt,’ I said. ‘But ... it’s time to go home.’”

“NOOO!” came a resounding chorus. ‘NO! It’s too soon! Do we have to? Can’t we stay longer?’

“As I was absorbing this message, there came a similar noise from down the hall where Mrs. Berubé had entered the classroom. ‘NOO!’ chorused the sixth graders. ‘We don’t want to leave! We want to stay!’

“It was a lovely way to end our first day.”

And a lovely way to start the fall term. And a lovely way to inaugurate a new school. Most of all, it was a lovely way to launch thirty excited girls on what promises to be the voyage of a lifetime.

Well done, everyone!

Our Girls Have Already ...

- explored the New Bedford harbor on the Enviro-Lab;
- ridden bicycles through New Bedford’s South End;
- toured an art gallery;
- attended the symphony;
- created circuits to light an entire miniature town;
- and so much more.

These are life-changing moments that will build a positive future for our girls. Thank you for helping us make it happen!
Greetings from the Executive Director

On Monday, October 27th, members of the New Bedford community joined us at our new school to celebrate our opening in the city. Mayor Scott Lang, Senator Mark Montigny and OSS parent Jocelina Pires took the podium to show our deep appreciation for the opportunity for 30 intrepid young women to set sail on this historic voyage.

“Hilary Clinton said that it takes a village to raise a child,” said 5th grade parent Ms. Pires. “Well,” she continued to the assembled crowd, “YOU are the village.” How very right she is. Only a little over one year ago, OSS was a vibrant dream among members of the Greater New Bedford community -- a vision for the future of our young women, and the future of the South Coast region. With a snip of rope – our tribute to the nautical source of our school name – Our Sisters’ School officially “cast off” on the journey of our first academic year.

With shining smiles and sparkling, hopeful eyes, our girls listened to the speakers as they challenged each student to make the most of this unique opportunity. Our staff was filled with gratitude to each and every person who has been the wind in our sails for our journey to this day. We would not be here without your support, and we look forward to our future together. Thank you.

Message from the Board

To say that this fall has not been the best of times is putting it mildly. Yet even in the current climate of economic gloom there are reasons for hope and optimism. The launching of Our Sisters’ School a few short weeks ago – a bright light that chased away the darkest shadows – is surely one of them. The very existence of OSS provides a positive, inspirational example of what a community can do when it comes together and works hard to transform a dream into a reality. Two brief years ago, the notion of a middle school for inner-city girls from New Bedford was only that – a notion, an idea, a dream. But the idea took hold, and gained momentum. Bright, dedicated people from all walks of life – teachers, community leaders, lawyers, educators, writers, social workers, parents – joined forces to create this dynamic new school. To turn a hazy dream into the shining reality so happily ensconced today at 145 Brownell Avenue.

Today, 30 young girls read “Island of the Blue Dolphins,” study magnetism and electricity, learn civics by closely following the presidential election, paint with pastels, play sports, and go on field trips on the Enviro-Lab boat in New Bedford harbor.

Today, worlds heretofore unimagined open up to the girls every day as they listen during morning meetings to speakers who share their life stories -- a documentary filmmaker, one of the first women in the New Bedford police department, a math teacher, a weaver, a social worker … and on and on.

As indicated above, times are tough and people everywhere are battening down the hatches. But the proper response to tough times is not retreat. Indeed, today more than ever we need to be proactive. During coming weeks and months, there will be cuts in the municipal services New Bedford provides, and reductions in state and federal support to the local community, and the families who will suffer most from these cuts are precisely the families the OSS community has pledged to serve. Today more than ever, we must do whatever we can to honor that pledge.

Under the leadership of Lisa Yates, the staff at OSS has created a vibrant laboratory of learning and a safe and welcoming sanctuary for thirty deserving New Bedford girls. None of this would have been possible without your support. Please come visit us and experience for yourselves the pride and happiness each of our girls feels when she walks through the open doors of our bright and shining new school. Better yet, feel that pride and that happiness in your own selves … because you helped make it happen!
Message to Donors – 50% Match on Every Dollar Raised

The OSS Development Committee has been busy. We had an extremely successful summer during which the school was introduced to many new people in New Bedford and the surrounding communities. Special thanks to the families, who each hosted an event on the school’s behalf. As a result of all this enthusiastic activity, support for and interest in the school have been on the rise, and we are close to reaching our financial goal for 2008. Many thanks again to all of you who have been so generous.

Now comes a special opportunity to do even more. If someone were to give you five dollars for every ten dollars you raised yourself, wouldn’t you want to get busy raising those ten-dollar bills? Of course you would! And this is precisely where OSS finds itself positioned until December 26. During this period, we will receive a 50-percent match on every dollar we raise, an arrangement which could have a huge impact on our fiscal position and security going into 2009 and 2010. This is an incredible opportunity for OSS and one we must take advantage of until the end of the year. Your sponsorships and donations during this period will have more impact – and be more appreciated – than ever.

Our goal is to have every one of you feel vested in Our Sisters’ School and its future. Please remember in your daily lives that you are our most persuasive voices and our most effective advocates, because you truly understand and believe in the great work being done for our girls. So, please, spread the word. If you know of someone -- friend, business partner, family member -- who would like to learn more about the school, please let us know. We are here as your support team and will happily make information available to anyone at any time.

OSS Wish List

Sponsorships:
- Four year student sponsorship $ 35,000
- Classroom teacher $ 25,000
- Lead teachers $ 10,000
- One-year student sponsorship $ 8,000

Annual Expenses:
- Student transport. $ 20,000
- Athletic equipment & playing fields $ 15,000
- Playground $ 10,000
- Classroom supplies $ 7,500
- Math program $ 5,000
- Science program $ 5,000
- Social Studies program $ 5,000
- Visual Arts program $ 5,000
- Performing Arts program $ 5,000
- English and Language program $ 5,000

Please visit our website, at: oursistersschool.org/html/funding.html for additional wish list items.

Why I want to be a student at Our Sisters’ School…

Grade 5 Students

“I want to come to Our Sisters’ School because I think the number of children is so small and I will get so much attention. I also want to come here because I love the fact that I get to learn a new language which is Latin.”

“I would like to go to Our Sisters’ School because I want to go to a good college so I can get a good education.”

Grade 6 Student

“I want to go to Our Sisters’ School because I think I have an opportunity to achieve my goal of becoming a marine biologist and because it sounds fun with lots of activities. I think I will be more focused because there won’t be any goofy boys to distract me.”
Our Sisters’ School continues to receive wonderful media coverage surrounding our opening days. Please visit the News & Events page of our website (www.oursistersschool.org/html/newsandevents.html) to read more.

A special thank you to Reynolds DeWalt for your support in publishing Voyages.