Audacious Mission

The Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE) awarded Our Sisters’ School accreditation citing the School’s “audacious mission” and the positive impact it has had upon students and families. The report commended OSS on all that it has accomplished during its short existence and provided positive recommendations for the coming decade that are completely in line with the School’s strategic plan. The OSS community is pleased that AISNE recognized our wholehearted commitment to supporting middle school girls in Greater New Bedford with a powerful academic, social and emotional school experience.

Head of School Sarah Herman said, “This is a profoundly important validation of Our Sisters’ School, our mission, and the work we have done in the 11 years since we opened our doors in 2008.”

The accreditation process, as laid out by AISNE, “…strengthens the school’s commitment and congruence to its mission, facilitates institutional reflection and self-evaluation, provides structure and a timetable for institutional reflection, dialogue and change, and allows for performance measurement against a wide range of standards of good practice.”

OSS embarked on the comprehensive year-long self-evaluation by re-examining its mission, curriculum and resources, admissions procedures, communication, staffing, professional development, governance and administration to ensure positive alignment in all areas at the School. The resulting self-study was presented to AISNE for peer review prior to their sending a team of visiting administrators and educators to immerse themselves at OSS for three days. This visit provided AISNE with first-hand exposure and involvement in the School’s culture and operations, and time to evaluate OSS’s successes and make suggestions for its continued growth.

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Looking Forward
by Sarah Herman, Head of School

Looking into the future as I finish my sixth year leading OSS, I am inspired by meeting the girls of the incoming fifth grade, knowing that we will be on an exciting journey to unlock their potential. This enrollment process helps us realize how much each of our students grows each year—physically, emotionally and intellectually. I remain dedicated to the work we’ve been doing to challenge ourselves as teachers and students, as well as the work that lies ahead. I offer deep thanks to our dedicated teachers and staff who work tirelessly to educate and contribute to our community, and to our generous supporters who continue to make our work possible. This edition of Voyagers highlights some of our successes and our path as we move forward. Enjoy our story.

“I remain dedicated to the work we’ve been doing to challenge ourselves as teachers and students, as well as the work that lies ahead.” Sarah Herman

Cooking up Academic Achievement

Achieving strong academic outcomes requires a pinch of mystery and a dollop of special sauce. It also includes a nuanced and challenging-to-prepare list of fundamental ingredients. At OSS, we tirelessly refine our work and we have affectionately named some basic ingredients our Pillars of Pedagogy:

Teach for Understanding
The purpose of an education is to understand our world, not to simplify it into meaningless pieces. We quickly forget facts that are not grounded in relevant concepts. Our brains remember and are able to apply learning that is logically connected to a larger context, and our own experiences.

Careful Planning by Capable Teachers
Effective teaching requires a vision for a final learning destination and a path to get there. Thus, we use backwards design; we identify learning targets and essential understandings for the year, followed by unit planning, and then lesson planning. We begin with the end in mind.

Engaging Instruction
We aim for students to recognize the interconnectedness and pertinence of their learning. We collaborate cross-curricularly and plan units integrated with community organizations, community members, and real-world experiences.

Data-Informed Instruction
We utilize data to inform and improve our teaching practice. Quantitative and qualitative data informs how our students are progressing. In December and June, students lead portfolio presentations to reflect on their individual progress and set personalized goals. Portfolios are complemented by regularly scheduled STAR literacy and math assessments that further inform our understanding of each student’s needs.

Fundamental Academic Skills
A person’s working memory is very difficult to be successful if certain pieces of information are not automatic, it is limited, so if certain pieces of information are not automatic, it is difficult to be successful with more complex tasks and topics. When students struggle, we provide academic tutoring and flexible scheduling to facilitate small group work that reinforces and accelerates progress.

Community Core is our Center
Our staff and students are expected to be thoughtful, intentional, and reflective at all times. Our Community Core vocabulary is embedded into the school culture, ensuring that everything, including academic lessons, is planned through a Community Core lens. This builds consistency and focus on our core values of Excellence, Community, Citizenship, and Leadership.

Maintain Growth Mindsets
We teach students the theory of multiple intelligences and the idea that all skills can be developed through sustained hard work. We emphasize that intelligences are grown, and not born.

Voice and Choice
We create opportunities for voice and choice because students are more engaged when they feel seen and heard. Choice helps us consider the individual strengths and needs of each student. Eighth-grade Creative and Visual Arts classes enjoy “open studio” where they work as authentic artists, creating self-directed work plans and generating meaningful and personal pieces.

We offer opportunities for responsibility and control, like managing freedom during lunch and recess or simply walking independently between classes. With every opportunity, we provide clear expectations, guidance, and scaffolding so students are more likely to succeed.

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Lisa Schmidt Alvord, OSS co-founder and Board of Trustees co-chair commented, “This accreditation is the result of the dedication and hard work of the Head of School, the Board, and the hundreds of volunteers from our community who have made the transformative power of educating girls their passion. We are proud of our students and parents who partnered with us on this remarkable journey, and we look forward to continually refining and improving our model on the next leg of our voyage.”
Q. Eight years ago OSS graduated its very first class of students. How does the School measure success?

A. The first cohort of 10 “sister sailors” are making waves—graduating college, taking on internships, traveling internationally, holding down jobs, contributing to their communities and continuing their studies.

Our definition of success means that each girl took advantage of opportunities, built competencies and explored fearlessly. Each alumna was empowered to set goals and be forward-thinking. They were also provided with tools, academically and emotionally; to succeed no matter the path chosen after OSS — our graduates exhibit intellectual curiosity, mastery of oneself and have hopes heretofore undreamed of.

For some graduates, their paths led to a pursuit of knowledge in various scientific fields. Rabiet Dasher received a bachelor’s degree in psychology and is a pre-med major. Vanessa Martinez’s bachelor’s degree in biology from Bridgewater State University will set her up for a great career as a lab technician! Irene Luperon is finishing her studies in neuroscience, with a minor in Chinese, this December at the University of Southern California. This summer, she will intern at a local non-profit.

Rabiet Dasher is a newly-minted University of New Hampshire graduate with a dual bachelor’s degree in civil engineering and international affairs. Arianna Mello graduated from Phillips Academy Andover and is completing her studies at Amherst College. Aaliyah Colon graduated from BCC while she works at a local non-profit helping others with the summer touring Greece. Plans thereafter — social media marketing for a non-profit in her hometown, New Bedford! And speaking of the places our graduates go, Samantha Chan, armed with a bachelor’s degree in information systems and decision science from California State University Fullerton, has joined Destination America (The Travel Corporation) as their business development coordinator.

Our definition of success means that each girl chose after OSS— our graduates are leaders in the interconnected society of the future. Carissa Mak is a nationally-recognized student and artist. A recently recognized achievement included winning first place in the national U.S. Track and Field Championships, a gold medal in the national U.S. Relays Championships, a silver medal in the national U.S. Triathlon Championships, and a bronze medal in the national U.S. Cross Country Championships. Carissa is a member of the National Honor Society, the National Art Honor Society, the National Latin Honor Society, and the National French Honor Society. She has served as the president of the National Honor Society and as the co-captain of the National Latin Honor Society. Carissa is also a member of the National Art Honor Society and the National French Honor Society.

The Class of 2011 celebrated at OSS when they graduated high school in 2015.
Inspire, Inspire!

If it’s 7:50 am on a Tuesday or Thursday, our 65 students are all-eyes forward, focusing on the words, perhaps the music, photos and first-hand accounts of our guest in the community room...

H ere or she could be a painter, marine biologist, college professor, poet, an OSS alumna, the New Bedford Symphony Musical Director, an expert of cyber security formerly with Homeland Security, or the heads of Bristol Community College, the Wheeler or Epiphany Schools—all because it’s Morning Speaker time.

The OSS core values of Excellence, Community, Citizenship and Leadership are reinforced in myriad ways. We welcome members of our community and their friends to inspire and expand the sea of knowledge for our girls by sharing their careers, passions, and life stories. Joseph Wooten (Steve Miller Band member and philanthropist) visited and imparted the wisdom “make an impact on future generations.” Dr. Yolanda Troubleshoot, an otolaryngologist in Dartmouth, discussed her 22 years in the field of ear, nose and throat care and hon. Merita Hopkins and Savannah’20

exhorted the students to “dream big.” After learning about the importance of voting and her career in the law, students declared “I want to be a judge” all because the Hon. Merita Hopkins, a Massachusetts Superior Court justice, took the time from her busy morning to speak to our girls. Tracy UMass ’18 graduate and economics major, enlightened all of us with her descriptions of life at home—in Zambia. Dr. Jill Walsh, Boston University social work professor, poet, an OSS alumna, exhorted the students to “let go of the familiar,” “let go of the comfort zone,” “let go of the comfortable life,” “Let go of the familiar, let go of the comfortable life...” “Make an impact on future generations.”

Joseph Wooten, Steve Miller Band media lecturer, spoke about posting photos that make YOU happy, and not because others might like them. Jesiliana Ortega ’12 came with a forceful message—she is a data science major at UMass Dartmouth, and only one of five women in a class with over 100 men. “Take advantage of opportunities even if they’re not geared toward women or any part of your identity.” In another words, “let go of the familiar,” an example of an OSS core value tool.

We invite YOU to come tell your story—inspire our girls and broaden their horizons. Can you find 25 minutes to spare? E-mail Head of School Sarah Herman at sherman@oursistersschool.org.

#SHOUTOUTSOSS

Living our “Audacious Mission”

The visiting team of educators representing AISNE (Association of Independent Schools in New England) commend OSS for its audacious and intentional mission-driven program that “challenges students to be their best selves academically, personally and as active, engaged citizens of the community and the world.” The School was also commended on our work for building strong connections with our families and the broader community, including efforts to engage over 150 volunteers in our work.

Three-peat awards in Robotics

OSS took the FIRST LEGO League Team Spirit Award in 2017, and we were Southeastern Mass. finalists last year. Our team made it to the state championships in 2019 AND received the award for Gracious Professionalism. Kudos also go to Trustee Kim Francis who has fostered the schoolwide interest in robotics!

Full STEAM Ahead

OSS students inspired over 200 young girls when they did the opening presentation, as well as two workshops, at the STEM4Girls Conference at UMass Dartmouth.

The New England League of Middle Schools conference in Providence provided the opportunity for our students to demonstrate their knowledge, enthusiasm, and poise as they skillfully presented a one-hour workshop on building STEM programs for middle school teachers.

NAACP Community Award

Drea Moore joined OSS in 2018 as an AmeriCorps teacher. She was recently honored for her leadership and work done to create the UMass Dartmouth NAACP college chapter.

Alumnae News

The spotlight shines brightly on Jarynette Gonzalez ’11 who wrote, directed and scored a short film entitled The Girl That Lit the World, featured in 2019’s LUNAFEST SouthCoast Film Festival. We celebrate Jary’s commitment to art expression in this independent work.

Emma Cranford ’18 has her bags packed for another summer abroad with International Camper Exchange. Last year she visited Mexico to help in an orphanage, and 2019 promises adventure in New Zealand working at a youth camp. We are proud of her adventurous spirit and civic focus!

Students News

Eight student artists were chosen to be part of the Massachusetts Art Education Association’s statewide youth exhibit in the State Transportation Building in Boston. Shoutouts to Alexia, Autumn, Ayah, Imanee, Janice, Joneris, Lesley and Modupeola for their powerful artwork.

Alumnae News

The Class of 2019 graduates on June 11 and will move on to their next journey in the fall. Our eighth-grade students worked hard on their applications to 16 independent and public schools. They will be attending: Dartmouth High School (7) Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational-Technical High School (6) Providence Country Day School, Providence, RI (1) Rosey High School, Aurora, IL (1) St. George’s School, Middletown, RI (1)

Alumnae News

The Class of 2015 applied to 28 colleges and universities, from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY, to Providence College, to Florida State University. While a few graduates have yet to make their decisions, others will be attending: Barry University, Miami, FL (2) Bristol Community College, Fall River, MA (6) Dean College, Franklin, MA (1) Stonehill College, Easton, MA (1)

The Next Voyage

Secondary School Update

The Class of 2019 graduates on June 11 and will move on to their next journey in the fall. Our eighth-grade students worked hard on their applications to 16 independent and public schools. They will be attending: Dartmouth High School (7) Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational-Technical High School (6) Providence Country Day School, Providence, RI (1) Rosey High School, Aurora, IL (1) St. George’s School, Middletown, RI (1)
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OUR SISTERS’S SCHOOL
NEW BEDFORD, MA

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Head of School: Sarah Herman
Graphic Design: Cela Hobbs
Photography: Kim Goddard, Virginia Sutherland and OSS staff

Mission Statement:
As an independent, tuition-free, non-sectarian middle school, our mission 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”?
Our school’s name honors the bravery of the women known as “sister sailors” who boldly headed out to sea from New Bedford’s harbor during the city’s whaling days. Like these women, OSS students courageously embark on a voyage in a challenging academic environment carefully crafted to support them as they discover and achieve their greatest potential, while finding true north on their moral compass.

SUPPORT THE OSS ANNUAL FUND
Unlike charter schools, OSS is not eligible for state funding as a single-sex school and we rely solely on our friends and foundations. Your generosity makes it possible for OSS to provide a transformative education to our girls. Make a gift today at www.oursistersschool.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 to the School 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, admission policies, athletic 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.

Photo above left: Robotics team with trustee Kim Francis (far left) and Creative & Visual Arts and STEAM teacher Tobey Eugenio (far right)