

## **School Committee Report to Iowa Yearly Meeting Conservative July 2016**

It has been a full year, with many rewards and uplifting experiences paired with the challenges of maintaining a boarding school in this day and age. The School Committee recognizes and greatly appreciates Thomas for his steady engagement in finding solutions, while running the extra miles in this endurance marathon that is Head of School, and bringing it all forth in the Quaker spirit of Light and joy. He and the staff continue to envision the future and cultivate the development of our school and its students with great care and dedication.

This has been another year of low enrollment which has forced us to look critically at who we are and what we do. In this time of reflection there are questions we ask:

### **“Why is living in a Quaker community important?”**

As a Quaker school we strive to provide a safe, supportive and inclusive environment so young people may become more wholly who they are and realize their full potential. Over the last few years the community has been in deep discernment about gender identity and exploring ways we can better understand and meet the needs of transgender youth, and we believe the Quaker principles are guiding us upon this path of creating a welcoming community. Through this ongoing thoughtful work and with the blessing of the School Committee the school has renamed the dormitories to the “East Dorm” and “West Dorm”, and we enjoy the extra bonus that these new labels embrace our Midwestern fondness of compass directions. For more on gender identity in Quaker schools we encourage members to read the May 2016 Friends Journal article about George School’s journey through this process.

One a state level, Scattergood has been held up as an example of good practices for ensuring students safety. Thomas has been asked to work with state representatives on the delicate task of constructing legislation that serves to protect children not just at Scattergood but all students in residential facilities throughout the state. We are grateful for the careful work of Thomas and the ongoing support of our representatives.

### **“Why is Quaker education important?”**

At Scattergood we work to foster the ideals of community, spirituality, responsibility, equality, stewardship and social justice; our curriculum is steeped in these values. We know that a student’s personal development is as central to their education as their academics, that character growth is as crucial as intellectual growth, and that teaching students to think and feel deeply is a way to change the world. We embrace that everyone can be both a teacher and a pupil, and experiential learning is part of our model. We are a work-in-progress of living out these ideals that are not common practices in most schools thus providing a unique opportunity for students, staff and faculty to experience living and learning in a Quaker community.

### **“Why is experiential learning important?”**

Experiential learning bridges the gap between theory and practice. Students learn real-world skills with concrete experiences and are motivated because they are engaged in the relevancy of the lesson. Experiential learning creates self-directed learners and promotes curiosity.

**“Why is the Farm experience in our academics important?”**

The Scattergood Farm experience teaches stewardship, cooperation, service to the community, experiential learning, the scientific process, realities of food, and so much more. Louis Herbst said it well in his Farm Initiative document:

*“How could we simultaneously emphasize our farm, college preparatory academic program and socially develop our students in an authentic and relevant way? From this query, our Farm Immersion Program was born. Our Farm Immersion Program encompasses freshmen and sophomores' science, math, Spanish, and history classes for their entire first quarter. Students in the Farm Program spend all weekday mornings at the farm doing a variety of projects in which they learn and use skills from those four disciplines. Our approach is largely interdisciplinary, constructivist and inquiry based. Given this pedagogical approach, our two goals are to help students see the interconnected nature of all academic disciplines and create the opportunity to take co-ownership of our school's organic farm.”*

As stated earlier, enrollment continues to be low. Some of our long-term goals have been put on hold as we address the immediate issue of attracting students. Our priorities are increasing enrollment and financial stability while still ensuring a viable community, for as we move forward to expand our student body we want to retain the core that defines us: living in community, Quaker education, amazing and authentic academics, a work program, and a farm experience.

Feeling the acute pressure of the enrollment issue we felt a bold step was needed. Last fall the school committee with Thomas and staff endeavored into the lengthy strategic planning process which focused on emphasizing our strengths and what makes us unique. The success of the Farm Immersion program has convinced us that the farm should be added to the already strong and creative academic program and should be central to our Strategic Plan. There is great excitement about this direction within both the school and the school committee.

It may be years before we reap the harvest of the Farm Immersion Program and our increased Admissions efforts and we cannot bank on enrollment increasing as rapidly as is needed. The school has felt the pressures of low cash flow throughout the year and we are grateful for the cooperation of the Scattergood Foundation helping us manage the low points. The Strategic Plan includes requesting three-year pledges beyond the Annual Fund to supplement the low tuition income during this experimental time when enrollment will likely remain below sustainable levels.

The School Committee is convinced that the world needs and is changed by these young people who have lived and learned in this Quaker community of Scattergood. We are deeply moved and inspired by the direction the school is taking to incorporate the farm as a major tool in teaching both values and academics. Our experience this year re-affirms, “Scattergood is the Yearly Meeting's witness to manifest Love in the world.” We invite everyone to not only read our Strategic Plan but to visit the school, enjoy the food from the farm, visit with students and staff, and explore what it means to be a part of Quaker education within this unique community.

For the School Committee,  
Ruth Hampton, clerk