

2024 Head of School Report to IYMC

As the Head of School, my work affords me the opportunity to travel the nation and meet with Friends, alums, schools, Meetings, conferences, and the occasional national park. I get to talk about Scattergood, its history, its values, its people, and its future. I get to hear what the school was like with Leanore Goodenow running things, and learn what has changed and what remains constant. While these travels are very rewarding, I am always grateful to return to our beautiful campus and these amazing people, where I become once again inspired to share the story of Scattergood and the wonderful work happening. In this report I will endeavor to be brief, but know that I am happy to share more, should we have the opportunity to visit in the coming year.

During the 2023/2024 school year, Scattergood welcomed 11 Middle School students and 25 high school students to our campus. Two were international students from Germany and China, four were staff children, and seven were participants in the Iowa state ESA program. Commencement was held on June 1st in the Meeting House for the first time since 2019 and celebrated a class of 8 seniors, half of whom joined us during the unusual and challenging quarantine year of 2020. The legacy of this senior class will be felt for years to come, perhaps most clearly in the form of the beautiful glass tile mosaic they created for their Senior project.

Our staff roster saw several shifts this year as we welcomed some new faces, said goodbye to others, and saw some roles shift. Those joining us included Jess Havlicek-Epps, as our School Nurse, Jeremy Schwenker as a part-time counselor, and Salomé Phillmann teaching Spanish.

Staff members who joined us for the year before moving on, include Jennifer Peterman (Math and Computer Science), Hochi Rosario Cuevas (Spanish), and Maor “Bug” Shapiro and Cameron McReynolds, who each spent a semester as our Student Activities Coordinator. Barbara Fisher, has taken on the role of Learning Support Coordinator and works with our teachers and students to support students with learning differences and/or neuro-diversity. CY Costa, who joined us as our Artist-in-Residence in the fall of 2023, returns to direct our Drama Program. We are grateful for all of these new staff members, as well as all of those who returned for their second, fourth, or even twentieth year. In March, the staff transformed the auditorium and themselves into Mt Olympus and the pantheon of Greek Gods, creating a unique and memorable experience. Our staff bring the magic of Scattergood to life and should be celebrated for their Herculean efforts. We have begun taking steps to bring compensation more in line with industry standards and to more accurately reflect how deeply we value their work.

This year we completed our re-accreditation with the Independent School Association of Central States (ISACS) and the membership renewal with the Friends Council on Education (FCE). Scattergood staff members conducted a self-study over a year and a half using the ISACS rubric, exploring all facets of school life, policy, and operations. In November, we welcomed four ISACS representatives, Joe Mueller (Friends School Minnesota), Christian Acemah (Olney Friends School), Sherry Krebsbach (St. John’s Preparatory School), and Adrian Spencer (Chicago Friends School), who affirmed our work, and recommended continued accreditation. This Spring we submitted our Membership Renewal Report to FCE, which focused on the school’s spiritual life, values, and connection to Quakerism. We welcomed Peter Gaines (Tandem Friends School) and founding Head of Princeton Friends School, Jane Fremon. This was a delightful visit and reaffirmed our membership with the FCE.

The work of maintaining a campus the size of Scattergood is an ongoing and ever evolving challenge. Matt Gauder and Eli Ehlinger have risen to this challenge and worked with a number of contractors to further projects both large and small. This winter we activated our new Solar Grid and began meeting our energy needs in a more sustainable manner. As I write this, work continues on the exterior of the instruction building which looks to be a major improvement to the appearance of our campus. Behind the scenes we have also been looking to the future and both the capital projects that will be undertaken in the next year or two, and to the future of the campus as our program and needs continue to evolve.

This past fall, we introduced a new Daily Expectations System, that aims to utilize timely conversations with advisors, crew leaders, teachers, and others, to help students address challenges, correct behaviors, and live into our community and student expectations. This program has been a success and we have seen a reduction in the overall number of slips given and conversations with students whose behaviors have risen to a more serious concern. We are grateful for Sonja Sponheim and Sadie Kirschenman, who have led this work.

Using the Farm Concentration as inspiration, we have crafted a Focus Program for students who seek to align their High School work around one of three areas: Sustainable Agriculture, Arts and Craftsmanship, or Peace and Social Transformation. Students in the Focus Program will work with a mentor, complete a capstone project, and select electives, all aimed at providing practical opportunities for students to explore their interests while in High School. We launch our pilot of this program this coming school year with 7 students and representation in each Focus. The school website contains more detailed information on the program and I look forward to updating you as it evolves.

While we are excited for the wonderful work being done, we cannot ignore the challenges the school has faced this past year. Last July, I shared that we were undertaking a shift in our approach to admissions, utilizing a team, rather than a single admissions director. Throughout the year Jamie Newton has led our admissions efforts, working closely with Sam Taylor and a team of administrators to build a community of learners that fit the program and values of Scattergood Friends. This work is wide-ranging and includes outreach and relationship building with local independent elementary schools and regional Quaker and progressive schools, alongside improved communication, marketing, and customer service. These efforts will not solve our enrollment challenges in a single year, but have already shown indicators of success. Seven of our eight 8th graders will be returning as Freshman this coming fall. Additionally, we enter the year with eight prospective students who have plans to join us for the 2025/2026 school year. As the Tortoise and Hare teach us, slow and steady wins the race.

The greatest gift I have ever received as an educator has been watching students grow and evolve over the course of our time together. Often, the students whose journeys prove most inspiring are those who encountered challenges, and through perseverance, reflection, and compromise, were able to find growth and a path forward. Right now, we seek to take on major projects and to implement new initiatives, while simultaneously grappling with questions as to our identity, our values, and our future goals as a Quaker school. This work and these conversations can be challenging, however, they can also be fruitful, rewarding, and can ultimately strengthen both Scattergood Friends School and Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative). We are learning, adjusting, and maturing as a school, just as so many of our students have. Perhaps you, too, can appreciate witnessing Scattergood evolve as we build on the good work of those who came before us. I am continually humbled and honored by the faith that has been placed in me to lead the Scattergood community and look forward to working with you in the coming years as we work to ensure that Scattergood remain a strong option for students seeking a Quaker education, far beyond our time as its stewards.

Respectfully submitted in peace and gratitude,
John Zimmerman