

Head of School Report to IYMC July 2025

“They say times are hard for dreamers...” When I first heard this phrase sung by our students in the spring production of *Amelie*, I was struck by how truly timely this message feels. Decisions being made at the federal and state level are impacting non-profit organizations across the nation, forcing some to close. There is a profound sense of frustration and division within our nation and across the globe. We cannot ignore the impact this has had on our community, both individually and collectively. However, we must also hold up the good work being done and the joy present in our community as we reflect on the 2024/2025 school year.

Scattergood welcomed 40 students to our campus this year, with 12 middle school students and 28 in high school. Of our high school students, 10 were day students and 3 were international students representing France, Germany, and Afghanistan. On May 31st, we celebrated the graduation of 5 seniors: Aaron Berg, Gus Ihrig, Louis Brown, Manon Wittek, and Oriole Keber. Included in this class are our first two middle school graduates (Gus and Ori), who were both a part of the inaugural 2020 middle school class.

The 2024/2025 school year presented some challenges for the staff at Scattergood Friends School as two of our new hires, Sneha Bhansali, and Alisa Meggitt, were unable to complete the year, leading to staff taking on additional responsibilities to cover for their absence. Thankfully, our staff was bolstered by Kirsten Brooks who taught Spanish, choreographed our musical, and co-lead our May trip to Colombia, in addition to her other teaching and student life support duties.

The end of the 2024/2025 school year carried an additional challenge for our staff as we look to face the realities presented by our ongoing enrollment levels. In order to create a budget that falls within a reasonable deficit level, as determined by the school committee, it was necessary to make significant adjustments in our spending, including staffing. This has resulted in the decision to reorganize our structure, and reduce our total staff size and cost. As a result, Jon David Stroud will be moving on from Scattergood, following six years of engaging and creative teaching, to pursue a graduate degree and a career in higher education. We have also made shifts in our administrative structure and the elimination of the Middle School Director role. Jamie Newton, will be carrying much of that work with him as he becomes Academic Dean, and Sam Taylor will bring his engaging energy and deep institutional knowledge with him as he takes on the newly created role of Director of Advancement, overseeing both development and admissions efforts. Our goal is to have a staff that reflects the current enrollment and student needs, without sacrificing the student experience or staff well-being. We believe these staffing changes will accomplish this as best we are able, giving our current realities.

The 2024/2025 school year was also filled with amazing events, partnerships, and opportunities for our students. While I could fill several pages talking about individual triumphs, innovative lessons, and memorable moments, here are but a few of the highlights.

In September we welcomed the Bread and Puppet theater who performed to an audience of over 200 people and transformed the center of campus into an interactive artistic experience that both delighted and challenged those in attendance with pieces that spoke to the current struggles of people around the world.

We continued to deepen our connection with other Quaker schools and organizations as our middle school program visited Chicago Friends and stayed in Evanston Friends Meeting House, while we hosted Friends School of Minnesota here on campus. We also held our 2nd annual Quaker Youth Retreat and participated in four events for young Quakers, including Northern Yearly Meetings annual sessions, and the Young Adult and Youth Gathering held by Friends General Conference.

Our drama program continued to thrive as Lumi Costa stepped into the role of director. The middle school conceived and performed an original play entitled, *Murder Most Vegital*, a silly spoof on the mystery genre. This spring, the high school presented the musical, *Amelie*, based on the movie of the same name. Both productions showcased the talent and efforts of our students and staff while delighting audiences.

This winter we welcomed Heather Bouwman, author of the New York Times best selling novel, *Scattergood*, to campus to speak with our students. The novel, set in West Branch during the summer of 1941, includes several scenes that take place on our campus as it served as a hostel for Jewish refugees.

The Focus Program completed its pilot year and will continue with some minor tweaks based on the feedback received from students. Our first capstone project was presented by senior Ori Keber, who hosted an art installation at Public Space 1 in Iowa City. The centerpiece of the installation, a large work that represents the Scattergood Community of Ori's senior year, is the artist's gift to our community, and is currently on display in the main lobby.

Our facilities team continued to lead efforts to improve our campus and guide our major capital projects. In addition to many minor, and some not so minor, projects we saw the completion of two of our Roots and Wings Campaign goals. The new well was completed during the school year and as of this writing, the sprinkler system installation is on track to be completed this summer and in accordance with the timeline mandated by the state of Iowa. With these projects completed, or nearly so, we are not looking ahead towards next summer and the installation of a geothermal heating/cooling system and renovations to the dorm bathrooms.

The fundraising efforts of the Roots and Wings campaign continued this year as well, with visits to alumni and other Friends of Scattergood bringing us to five different time zones. Ethan Huelskamp and I attended reunions, visited Meetings, and had many cups of tea as we learned about Scattergood's past, while building support for its future.

Every day, the news presents us with one more reason to consider giving up the dream of a brighter future and giving in to the cynicism that seems so prevalent. And yet, our work continues. We pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and move forward, not in spite of the harsh realities of the day, but because of them. Because we know that change begins with opening minds, planting seeds of hope, and helping our students, and perhaps ourselves, grow into the people we are meant to be. And so, I choose to remain optimistic, a dreamer, even as we face the challenges of today, for our work is preparing the dreamers of tomorrow and preparing them to leave this Friendly place and scatter good, wherever they go.

In peace,
John Zimmerman