



Voyages

*Our sisters then, our sisters today -
and a whole world waiting ...*

Our Sisters' School

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New Bedford's "Women of the Year!"

For their leading roles in the creation of Our Sisters' School, Chairwoman Lisa Schmid Alvord and Executive Director Lisa Yates have been named New Bedford's "Women of the Year" by the Standard-Times. *Congratulations to the two Lisas!* The entire OSS community is proud of you and your achievement, and proud to be part of the effort you have led so brilliantly!

Lisa Alvord is a documentary-film producer who has made several films on education, including the Peabody Award-winning documentary "Somerville High." "Education is the most transformative aspect of a child's life," she says. "If you can assure that your local educational system is strong and effective, then you know you're helping to create strong and effective citizens and a great country."

Before taking the helm of Our Sisters' School, Lisa Yates was

a teacher at the New Bedford Global Learning Charter School. "New Bedford's young people have so much to offer each other, their community and the world at large," she says. "Helping them realize these goals - helping them become active citizens and shapers of the future - is truly exciting."

Our two "Women of the Year" attribute the widely-acclaimed success of OSS to the hard work of staff members and the many community volunteers who have supported the project. "We two are really only the tip of the iceberg," says Ms. Alvord. "Many, many people have come together and worked hard to make all this happen. Our heartfelt thanks to all of them!"



Lisa Schmid Alvord and Lisa Yates with OSS students.
Photo: Peter Pereira/The Standard-Times

Making Waves: In The Community

October 2008

- Enviro-Lab Boat
- Ropes Course at Friends Academy
- ArtWorks! Gallery Tour
- Tour of a sukkah at Tifereth Israel Synagogue for Sukkot
- Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum, Apiary Program
- New Bedford Symphony Orchestra performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony
- Plimoth Plantation Field Trip
- Tree Planting Ceremony with Tifereth Israel Synagogue

November 2008

- Entries in Buttonwood Park Zoo Animal Poetry Contest
- Ocean Explorium Field Trip
- The Spencers' Theater of Illusion at the Z

December 2008

- First Federal Credit Union Field Trip
- Boston Museum of Science
- Veteran's Transition House Field Trip

Thank you to our community partners for these learning opportunities!

January 2009

- Ana Vinagre Performance
- Student Speakers at Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Remembrance
- UMass Dartmouth for Presidential Inauguration
- Travis Roy Assembly

February 2009

- Frederick Douglass Community Read-A-Thon
- New Bedford Whaling Museum
- Magic Lantern at the Z
- Rotch-Jones-Duff House – Lincoln Essays for AHA!
- YWCA Red Dress Event
- African-American Read-In Chain
- Boys of the Lough at the Z

March 2009

- NBSO Young People's Concert at the Z
- Rosa Parks play at the Z
- Successful Women In Math and Science (SWIMS) at UMass Dartmouth
- Mathemagic Performance at the Z
- Ocean Voices Panel at Ocean Explorium

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Greetings from the Executive Director

"She can't wait to get to school every morning, and on the weekends she says that she misses being here." – Mother of an OSS 6th Grader

We are just over two-thirds of the way through our very first school year, and the results are already beginning to show: Our Sisters' School has found successful strategies to begin achieving our mission to educate and inspire our students to reach their full potential. With an attendance rate of over 98%, and almost twelve hours a day of carefully constructed learning experiences, OSS students are growing right before our eyes. The students are excited to attend school – and reluctant to leave! Almost every day since we opened our doors this past fall, we have been late for dismissal as students ask us to "get one more thing out of my locker," or for time to "finish – I only have two problems left!" They are engaged in learning from the moment they walk in the doors at 7:45 am to the time they head home at 6:30 pm.

Small class sizes, a small school model, and the passion and dedication of OSS faculty, staff, and volunteers have created an environment where we can find the key to each student – the connection that "flicks the switch" and gets them engaged in learning in all areas of the school. Student-led report card conferences, weekly evaluations, and a focus on student self-assessment and accountability have made students take responsibility for their own learning, and have engaged families as partners in the educational and personal attainment of each student.

While we are only a beginning program – and thus it is early to show statistical gains in academic achievement – we know that our families are thrilled with, and excited about, the changes and growth in their children. They report increased

desire to attend school, better organizational skills and work habits, fewer discipline referrals and social problems, and an increased sense of hope and future possibilities. Our teachers also observe changes in the students. They see better study skills, higher levels of confidence and self-advocacy, and increased levels of engagement in academic and athletic activities. Several of our volunteer tutors for Evening Study were only supposed to stay for the first 12 weeks of the school year; however they volunteered to continue indefinitely throughout the remainder of the school year because they so greatly enjoyed working with the girls and seeing them grow and learn.

Feedback from the broader community also indicates that we are making great strides as a first-year school, and it would not be possible without your help. Our morning speakers, volunteers in the office and in the classroom, Board and committee members and community advocates show our students through their presence and participation that our community supports education and supports the students at Our Sisters' School. Your hopes and dreams for our girls have charted the course and we are pleased to be on this journey with you.

Thank you,

Lin Yates



Message from the Board

Last January, as the historic inauguration of President Barack Obama approached, there was much talk at the school about this momentous event and much interest in watching it on television. This presented a problem, since the school does not yet have a working television set. But not to worry. The entire OSS student body was invited to watch the event on a large-screen TV set up at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth in the Campus Center.

A few days later, UMass Chancellor Jean McCormack addressed a Martin Luther King, Jr., breakfast at the University. She spoke about how the great civil-rights leader would have been so profoundly moved by the Obama inauguration. But what made the most lasting impression on her, she recalled, was the look on the faces of our OSS girls throughout the presentation as they realized how far they can go.

I relate this story because it says a lot about our school and provides clear evidence that we are fulfilling our mission to challenge and expand our students' horizons. But the story

doesn't end here. The visit to UMass was sponsored by The Women's Resource Center at the University and their director, Dr. Juli Parker, who also volunteers at Our Sisters' School.

Community involvement - whether learning about the community or experiencing the community's cultural richness or volunteering within the community - has sent a positive message about our school throughout the city and a positive message about our city throughout the school. Thus, in its very first year, OSS has truly become a community school, a process in which so many of you, through your unstinting volunteer efforts and generous financial support, have been so critically involved.

I thank you all for your support and we urge you to come visit the school and meet with the students ... and see for yourselves how far they will go.

Lisa Selo Alvaid



Message to Donors, Volunteers and Friends

We are happy to announce that we reached our fundraising goals in 2008 thanks in large part to individuals, foundations and grant support from so many wonderful foundations, people and families. Our Sisters' School also received a 50% match from an anonymous donor who solidified our financial position going into 2009. Well done for our first school year; however, we already need to grow our program as we add a new grade level. We are grateful and thrilled to announce that our anonymous donor is back and has made the same 50% match commitment through December 21, 2009. This makes every dollar raised in 2009 that much more important and valuable!

A primary fundraising goal for OSS is to secure 15 new multi-year scholarships for each incoming class in an effort to ensure that we can say to every new 5th grade family that their daughter's education is secure until she graduates from the 8th grade. Please help us to live up to the promise with your continued support.

We hope that you will visit to see first-hand the

spirit and learning going on in this school. A great opportunity to visit is our **First Annual Art Show on June 4, from 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm.** We are turning the school into an art gallery for a night of fun and a display of great accomplishments.

I could not end this note without thanking all the incredible volunteers and community support that we continue to receive. We have had over 125 volunteers during this year who devote their time because they believe this school and these girls can and will make a difference. Come join "Our Crew" of supporters. **Every dollar counts, because every girl counts,** and we would not be here without the generous support of so many valuable and caring individuals. Please continue to keep OSS going and growing.

Please visit the "Giving" section of the Our Sisters' School website at www.oursistersschool.org/html/support_oss.html to learn more details about giving options and scholarship opportunities.

Barbara Hickey

OSS On the Horizon:

- 4/8: Family Meeting - Secondary School Options for OSS Graduates
- 4/15: OSS Students Read Poetry at the RJD House
- 4/16: OSS Science Fair
- 5/1: Law Day at the New England School of Law
- 5/10: Women's Fund Tiara Classic
- 6/4: OSS Art Show open to the community 5:30-7pm
- 6/19: Last day of our first school year!

Volunteers, Thank You:

Our Sisters' School would like to send a heartfelt thank you to all of our volunteers who demonstrate their unwavering support and love for the girls. The school is thriving thanks to you.

If you're interested in volunteering at Our Sisters' School, please contact us at:

info@OurSistersSchool.org

Learn about OSS:

Our Sisters' School will be conducting school tours through the end of the school year on Tuesdays at 1:00 pm. Please contact the Our Sisters' School office at 508-994-1255 if you are interested in joining us.

Oceans of Discovery



On the Lookout:

OSS is Recruiting Classroom Teachers for Fall 2009

Our Sisters' School will be adding another grade in 2009. We are looking for individuals passionate about teaching and working with the young women of this historic urban community as AmeriCorps service member volunteers. Please have interested individuals contact Executive Director Lisa Yates, at lyates@oursistersschool.org, or visit the OSS website at www.OurSistersSchool.org/html/employment.html for additional information.

OSS Mission and Goals

The mission of Our Sisters' School is to educate and inspire middle school girls from the Greater New Bedford area to reach their full potential in a safe, supportive and challenging environment.

Our Sisters' School challenges each student to reach her full potential by developing academic competence, social confidence, cultural proficiency, intellectual curiosity, integrity and hope.

Why "Our Sisters"?

During New Bedford's storied past, it was not uncommon for young wives to join husbands on extended whaling voyages. These brave young women were known as "Sister Sailors" and in their way, they were seeking then, on the oceans of the world, precisely what the brave young "sisters" of New Bedford are seeking today, in the classrooms of tomorrow: to sail beyond familiar horizons, into unknown oceans of adventure and possibility, of growth and learning and accomplishment. Our sisters then, our sisters today, and a whole world waiting...

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



Don't miss Our Sisters' School's first Annual Art Show, open from 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm on Thursday, June 4, 2009. Come meet the girls and see for yourselves the creative and inspiring work they have produced during their first year at OSS.

Save the Date:

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Program Highlights: Morning Meeting

Each morning, students at Our Sisters' School begin the day with a whole-school "Morning Meeting." On four mornings a week, after the Pledge of Allegiance, students hear from regional community members who have agreed to join our Speaker's Bureau. These individuals speak about their career paths, current jobs, educational experiences, travels, other special interests, and so on. Based on their own lives, these speakers provide powerful, *real* messages for the students. They also demonstrate, by their presence at Morning Meeting, the strong support OSS students enjoy throughout the regional community and that community's belief that education is vital for success in today's world. On the fifth morning each week, students practice their own public-speaking skills by taking turns as the morning speaker and sharing their own real stories and messages with their classmates and teachers.

"Music in the Morning" is also a valued part of Morning Meeting. Through our partnership with the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra, each week a piece of classical music is played and repeated, with introductory materials read aloud to provide background

information on the composer, instruments, type of music, and the time period of the composition.

Each Morning Meeting ends with our "worries and wishes" for the day. Students and staff share their hopes and concerns with each other, then "place" their concerns into a basket. This symbolic action is designed to help students transition to the school day with their "worries and wishes" behind them, their minds ready and eager to enter the classrooms and begin the learning process.



For more information about the exciting first year activity at Our Sisters' School, please visit our website.