

# Voyages



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

## Three Cheers for the Academic Advisory Committee

Three years ago, Our Sisters' School was merely an idea -- a hazy dream, a pleasant vision -- to offer girls from New Bedford a solid and comprehensive education at the middle-school level. People came on board because they believed it was high time to create an educational setting in which girls could focus primarily on academics, enrichment, sports and community.

*Well, we did it!* In just one-and-a-half years, we have developed a thriving school and an enthusiastic school community – thanks in large part to an incredible network of people who have demonstrated, and continue to demonstrate, that the Greater New Bedford community *wants* to be part of the OSS voyage.

These have been busy days. Many committees continue to work through policy and procedure as we build toward becoming

a full, four-year middle school in the fall of 2010. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our Academic Advisory Committee. This group has met for the past three years to develop curricula and to identify study materials that would enable Our Sisters' School to fulfill its educational mission.

It quickly became clear to committee members that before they could develop specific curricula they needed to further delineate the specifics of the OSS philosophy and what we hoped to create for our students. The committee spent many hours brainstorming ideas that individuals believed were essential to the education of our girls. After filling three wall-sized "white boards" with a broad selection of guiding principles, committee members realized that many of the ideas fell into the categories of "beliefs" or "methods for achieving beliefs." After many more meetings and much additional

discussion, the committee produced a document called "The Educational Beliefs of Our Sisters' School," supplemented by an additional document explaining how we intended to achieve each of the ten points made in the belief statement. That statement was then unanimously approved by the Academic Advisory Committee. and presented to the Board of Trustees in October 2009.

It is with great pride – and heartfelt thanks to the many members involved under the inspiring leadership of Kate Dabney – that we share these Educational Beliefs with you today.

*~ Lisa Schmid Alvord  
President, Board of Trustees*



### THE EDUCATIONAL BELIEFS OF OUR SISTERS' SCHOOL

- The students of OSS maximize their potential in a physically and emotionally safe environment.
- The culture of OSS embraces diversity.
  - All members of OSS's community are held to high standards.
- The curriculum of OSS allows students to develop:
  - Broad knowledge across and between traditional and emerging disciplines.
  - Communication and interpersonal skills that are effective in both independent and collaborative situations.
    - Self-confidence.
  - Intellectual curiosity and skills to benefit from learning opportunities throughout life.
- An understanding of others, respect for differences and consciousness of the interdependence of humankind.
- The teachers of OSS are provided with resources, support and continued professional development.
  - The adults and students of OSS build positive relationships that lead to the success of each student.
- The families of OSS are partners with the school in the work that we do with our students.
- The students of OSS will grow to become active members of their community and responsible citizens.
- The students of OSS will become lifelong learners.
  - The students of OSS all have the ability to achieve excellence.

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# Making Waves



## Reflections of two OSS student tour guides

“Being a student at Our Sisters’ School is like going on a voyage, and giving tours is just one part of it. Giving tours is a great opportunity to meet new people and introduce them to the school. Introducing people to Our Sisters’ School helps us become more open, and less nervous about public speaking.”

The student tour guides represent our school in a good way because people can see firsthand what our school is all about. It makes us proud to be OSS students when teachers ask us to give a tour.”

“The best question we are asked is, ‘Do you enjoy your school?’ We always respond with an instant ‘YES!’ One question no one has dared to ask is ... ‘Where are the boys?’”

~ Krystal and Lily, OSS 6th Graders



D



E



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**A** OSS and Nativity Prep students and faculty caroled downtown in Victorian costume as part of the New Bedford Holiday Stroll

**B** Colorful clothes and games made "Mix it Up Day" a blast!

**C** 7th Graders studied the Hubble Telescope at the Ocean Explorium

**D** Family Fun Night painting pumpkins for "Boo At The Zoo"

**E** Girls participate in MLK Gifts to Give Day of Service

**F** 7th Graders at the Ocean Explorium

**G** OSS says goodbye to our dedicated Coastline office assistant Mrs. Richards

**H** 5th graders showcase their Social Studies Fair project on Native Americans of the Western United States

**I** 6th Graders present their "Power Towers" Science Project

**J** 5th Graders aboard the Envirolab boat in New Bedford Harbor

# Greetings from the Executive Director

**“All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth.” – ARISTOTLE**

“Bom dia. Buenos dias. Bonjour. Nĩ hĩa.”  
When you walk by the computer lab or library at Our Sisters' School this year, you are greeted by the sounds of young women learning new languages in our first year of world language classes. Beginning this past September, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders at OSS had the opportunity to choose one of over thirty different world languages offered through the Rosetta Stone online language software program. Community volunteers work with students in small groups to enhance their experience with conversational classes in Spanish, Portuguese and Chinese. Students can also log onto the software through an internet connection outside of school and throughout the summer, allowing them to extend their lessons beyond the classroom walls. Several students are studying the language of their parents and their grandparents in more depth, and a few have taken on the challenge of learning a third language. Our staff members often step into the computer lab during world language class...just to listen for a moment...and to hear the world coming alive for our girls.

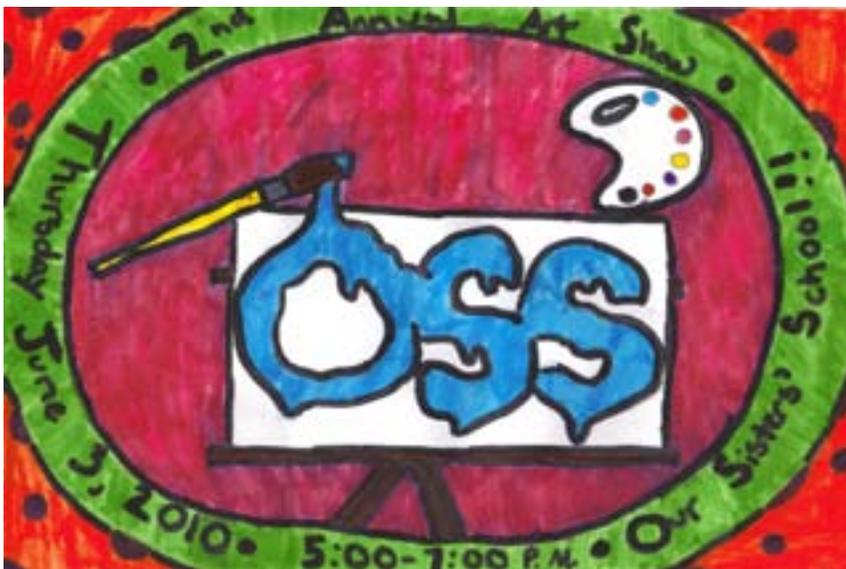
The world language classes are only one of the new elements of curriculum we have added to the academic program this second year. We have also added our first social studies fair to the calendar of celebrations of learning, with plans to again host our annual science fair and art show. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade also implemented a new study skills class to help our youngest students more easily navigate the transition to middle school. Both 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade added a remediation and enrichment period to the schedule to provide teachers with another opportunity to support or to challenge each student at her level of readiness. Our 7<sup>th</sup> graders (who will become our first graduating class in June of 2011...if we let them leave!) are embarking this spring on a new Secondary School Preparation class as they turn their eyes toward their educational future after OSS. We have also made some small changes in our school schedule to allow for additional instructional time in English, mathematics and science classes for most grades this year. Finally, with much enthusiasm, we have taken the first steps toward expanding our visual and performing arts program to include music and dance classes, and we hope to have our 7<sup>th</sup> graders begin taking instrument lessons before the school year ends.

Throughout the building, staff work with volunteers from our Academic Advisory Committee and from the community to research and develop these new courses of study, as well as to begin to plan ahead for our very first 8<sup>th</sup> grade class beginning next September. As always, the key to our success in maintaining and expanding our program is the dedication of our staff and volunteers toward creating a dynamic and rigorous curriculum that engages and inspires our students to take risks, reflect and improve, and identify their goals for moving forward with the help of their families and of our school community.

On a final note, we are proud to announce that OSS recently won the Nativity Spirit Award at the MaBaCh (math, basketball and chess) tournament. The girls gave 110% effort, demonstrated sports(wo)manship and collaboration, learned a great deal about competition, math, chess and basketball and had a tremendous amount of fun. Many thanks to the OSS staff and volunteers David Prentiss (basketball) and David Ehrens (math & chess), who prepared our students for the Tournament.

*Who has spirit? We do! We do!  
Congratulations to all and go Team OSS!*

*~ Lisa Yates, Executive Director*



**Save  
the  
Date!**

**2nd OSS Annual  
Art Show**

**Thursday, June 3, 2010  
5:00 pm-7:00 pm**

# Volunteering at OSS



Creating and running a school like OSS would not be possible were it not for the many dedicated volunteers who interact with the school on a daily basis. The belief that OSS can make a difference in the lives of the girls of Greater New Bedford is something we all share.

Last spring, as our volunteer network grew ever-larger, it became clear that we needed a Volunteer Coordinator to manage the network and to ensure that the school's needs and the many talented people eager to help were appropriately partnered. Today we are happy to introduce Hillary Parker, who has been the OSS Administrative Assistant and Volunteer Coordinator since August.

In her new position, Hillary oversees the recruiting and scheduling of volunteers in the following areas: front-desk coverage; administrative support; evening study

tutors; library volunteers; world language teachers; athletic coaches/teachers, etc. She works with the administrative staff to ascertain where specific needs exist, then presents those needs to the community by maintaining close communication with various outside organizations (ie., The United Way, SouthCoast Serves, UMASS Dartmouth, and many others ). At the present time, we are seeking volunteers in the following areas: Administrative Support, Evening Study Tutors, Athletic Coaches, Musical Instrument Instructors and the OSS Library. Anyone interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities at OSS should contact Hillary at: [HParker@oursistersschool.org](mailto:HParker@oursistersschool.org) or visit [www.oursistersschool.org/html/volunteer.html](http://www.oursistersschool.org/html/volunteer.html)

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## Reflections of an OSS Volunteer

Elizabeth White, Lead Teacher, 2009/2010 academic year

With time hanging heavy on my hands, finding a great volunteer opportunity has made retiring a little easier. As Our Sisters' School was beginning to set its sails, I volunteered to serve on the social studies curriculum committee, as my previous work had required my knowing the middle-school curriculum. This committee work, in itself, proved to be a learning experience both in language and content -- a new *lingua franca*, different perspectives and textbook politics.

As one thing led to another, mentoring and encouraging new teachers became part of the opportunity. Teaching middle schoolers can be challenging and anguishing, but it is never dull. Rather, it is always interesting and often entertaining. This is a wonderful age range to teach. The key question is how to pique a student's interest and fire up her curiosity -- to find the perfect point of entry. I remember, from my own past, a teacher named George Goethals slowly dimming the lights in a lecture hall, picking up a yardstick, then

suddenly slamming it on the table. *Thwack!* Now that got my attention!

The new teachers jumped right in with a contagious energy and connected with their girls in a positive, humorous and personal way. There are always certain facts or concepts that students really must know and understand, and there are frequently certain places where students go awry. It is useful for a teacher to know this beforehand. There are resources that have been helpful to me as a teacher, and it is my hope that they have been useful to the teachers at Our Sisters' School. It has taken me a year to learn how to be most helpful, how direct to be without being intrusive. It is easy to assume the teachers know exactly what they need to know.

Being a lead teacher has also included working with small groups of girls outside of the



Lead teachers: Gale Schultz, June Pina, Poo White (back), Priscilla Kennedy

classroom. This is really the best part of all possible worlds. Everyone learns something new; time flies; the girls interact, teach and encourage each other in a safe place.

Our Sisters' School is a community of learners. The collaborative approach, the energy, hard work and enthusiasm from all quarters are synergistic. Like the girls, I have learned much. Like the girls, I am eager to get to work in the morning.

# The Arts Continue to Thrive at OSS

The Visual and Performing Arts program at Our Sisters' School continues to grow and flourish with dynamic instruction, dedicated staff and volunteers, and thoughtful planning and execution. During the current school year, the program is built around four major components: Visual Arts, Drama, Dance and Music.



## OSS Visual Arts:

Our Visual Arts teacher, Mary Wayss, has been with us since our doors opened. She has developed a curriculum aligned with the state frameworks that has been the foundation of our Arts programming. Using various methods and materials, each grade moves forward to master new skills with careful presentation and hands-on tasks, critiques, self evaluation, vocabulary tests and quizzes ... and, best of all, meaningful two and three dimensional Art. The girls are learning that Visual Art can be narrative and have depth and mood. They have written about artists, art history and about themselves. Best of all, they are discovering that each new method brings them closer to the next, more complicated application.

## OSS Drama:

The fifth, sixth and seventh grades have been learning about drama and its purpose as a means of communicating about social issues, morality and life itself. They have learned some of the basic history of drama, and studied elements of the theatrical experience. They have memorized monologues, interpreted them as dialogues, have worked on improvisation and the basics of stepping into character and the suspension of disbelief in assuming a role. In-school productions for each grade highlighted the end of the

calendar year. For all of this, special thanks to Deb Baker for her time, teaching and dedication to making drama educational and fun.

## OSS Dance:

Dance workshops have been run by parents, volunteers and professional dancers. We recently finished an African Dance workshop with the 7th graders after which they were

invited to perform with UMass-Dartmouth's royal hartigan (yes, he does prefer his name in lower case). Our workshop instructor and dancer was Abbie Chambers. Our guest dancer was Lauren Falabella.

To date, we have had workshops in African Dance and Hip-Hop. Upcoming this spring, all grades will be studying multi-cultural dance thanks to a grant written with us in mind by The New Bedford Ballet Foundation with funding from the New Bedford Cultural Council. This workshop series will be followed by a special treat: the girls will attend (with complimentary tickets) the NBB's summer performance of "Cinderella."

## OSS Music:

Our Sisters' School has been building a unique music curriculum over the last year combining instruction in musical notations, sight reading, singing and theory with strands of singing together, classical performance and folk music. We have been developing lessons based on the Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Frameworks for 5th, 6th and 7th grade.

Working with equipment issued to us by a grant from the Ernie Boch Jr. Foundation "Music Drives Us," we have been able to play melodic and percussive instruments while sight reading melodies in preparation for our spring performance. Our fifth graders are learning to sight read with recorders. We are also currently looking for volunteers who can commit an hour a week for the rest of the school year to provide beginner instrument lessons for small groups of seventh graders on flute, clarinet, acoustic guitar and piano.

## Community Programs make Arts at OSS possible:

We are very fortunate to live in a community with a strong commitment to keeping the Performing Arts alive and making sure that the Arts, and especially performance and music, continue to be accessible to young people. In every part of OSS's Arts curriculum, we look to bring in professionals as visiting artists or performers and to take our students out into the various halls and theatres of the area. The Zeiterion Performing Arts Center, the New Bedford Symphony, the New Bedford Ballet Foundation and the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth's Visual and Performing Arts School -- all these and other groups have made it possible for us to afford such enrichment.



**Two examples of community arts partners:**

The New Bedford Symphony, with OSS kindly under its wing, has invited us to participate in numerous events over the last two years and has brought its own professional musicians to come to the school and perform on site free of charge.

Just this March we were able to gather with families to watch our 7th graders as they showcased their African Dance and Rhythm workshops with UMD Dancer/Instructor Abbie Chambers. Abbie has been working with the UMD African Music classes for many years and volunteered to teach a special dance to our students.

It has been very rewarding to work with professionals from the community here at our school. The students participate with obvious eagerness and their performances have made us all very proud.

## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

OSS families continue to demonstrate that they too are interested in getting more involved with the school. Our Family Fundraising Committee, to cite one example, has implemented two fundraisers this year which have raised over \$1200 for school-related programs. Two additional family-run events are planned in April and May. Many thanks to all these families for their great fundraising efforts!

## Advancement News

Support for the school has remained overwhelmingly positive and we continue to receive financial contributions from individuals, family foundations and grants. With the economic turmoil of the past year, we worried that fundraising goals would not be reached. We are pleased to report that – thanks in part to an anonymous donor who continues to match all funds received by 50% this calendar year – we have been able to reach our goal to support our operating budget and to start building a sustainability fund to fulfill our four-year promise to our students and their families.



**Ernie Boch Jr.'s Music Drives Us Foundation  
– donates new musical instrument and visits OSS**

and for all this support we are deeply grateful. Nevertheless, funding a school of 60 students with the depth of academics, enrichment, mentoring, support, sports and visual and performing arts requires us to keep reaching, as widely and deeply as we can.

We have found special success in introducing new people to OSS by putting on small gatherings at family homes throughout nearby communities. If you are interested in hosting one of these events on the school's behalf, please contact Barbara Hickey at [bhickey@oursistersschool.org](mailto:bhickey@oursistersschool.org).

Another wonderful way to introduce people to OSS is to invite them to the school for a tour. As you can see in the write-up on a prior page, the girls at OSS love to give tours. It is a valuable opportunity to work on their public speaking and to communicate with visitors from beyond the classroom and community outreach.

We are also happy to announce that our first Annual Report, covering our 2007–2009 fiscal years, can now be found on our website at [www.oursistersschool.org](http://www.oursistersschool.org) for your review. Many, many thanks to everyone for your continued support and involvement with the school. We would not be sailing on this incredible voyage without you and we look forward to sharing our school with you through a tour or a visit sometime soon.

~ Barbara Hickey – Director of Development

As part of our Annual Appeal, we continue to look to secure fifteen multi-year sponsorships for each incoming class to support each sponsored girl through her four-year tenure at OSS. Our financial base -- of donors, volunteers and grants -- has grown steadily

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## Buttonwood Park Zoo Rain Garden Service Project

In September, Our Sisters' School students kicked off the school year and renewed their commitment to community service and environmental awareness by volunteering to help to create a rain garden on the grounds of the Buttonwood Park Zoo. The rain garden project was designed by the Zoo to remediate problems with water run-off into Buttonwood Brook, using specially selected plants



to trap run-off in the soil. OSS students had a special opportunity – not just to learn about rain gardens and water pollution, but to dig right in and get their hands dirty in support of Buttonwood Park! We're fortunate that our school is situated so close to the park and that we're able to treat it as an extension

of our campus for athletics. The girls were excited to help out a community institution that they use so frequently and that they feel responsible for. OSS students went to the park grade-by-grade each day for a week and removed the grass layer from the designated area, exposing the soil underneath in preparation for the garden's planting. For many of our students, it was the first time they'd engaged in such physical gardening work, and maneuvering the spades and shovels was a new learning experience for them unlike any they're likely to come across in the classroom!